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# The Guitar Magazine

DECEMBER 2017 Vol 29 No 03 £4.99

## The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

*From the golden age of session playing to recording tips from Nashville's hottest producer*

**Starring...**

- THE WRECKING CREW
- DAVE COBB
- JOSH SMITH + MORE

DOES MAYBACH'S LESTER BURST GIBSON'S BUBBLE?
TURN TO p92

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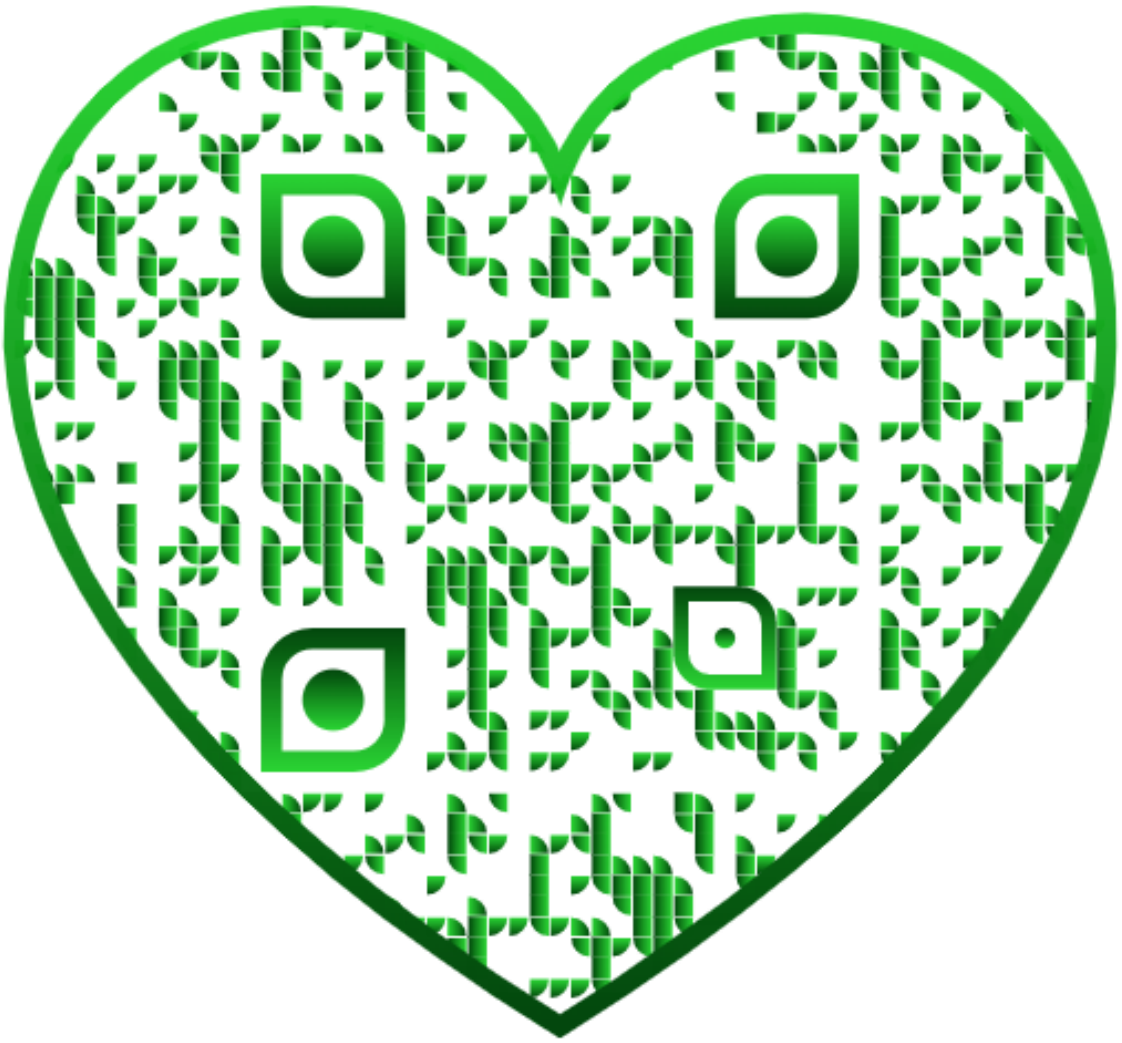

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# *Lightning in a bottle*

As much as I enjoy the spontaneous chemistry that comes with live performance, the recording studio has always held a peculiar allure and it's the environment in which I feel most at home as a musician. Perhaps it's because there's something endlessly fascinating about the way that certain recordings trap a moment in amber – a Wayfarered Dylan gone electric dragging his band through take after take in search of "that wild mercury sound" – while others are an example of what happens when the imagination of songwriters is unburdened by the need to replicate arrangements on stage, and given the space to run wild – *Revolver*, *Pet Sounds*, Elliott Smith's *Figure 8*.

Very few of us will ever be lucky enough to experience a big-budget studio session – sadly as we approach 2018 there aren't many big budgets left in the music industry to go around! – but the recording process itself has never been more democratised and nor has it been more accessible. And there's still plenty to be learned from the pros.

From p53 onwards, you'll find a massive 24 page feature devoted to The Secrets Of Studio Guitar. Following exclusive insights into the golden era of session guitar from Wrecking Crew luminary Carol Kaye and Tommy Tedesco's son Denny, we move into the modern age (albeit via a raft of vintage tube amps) with recording tips courtesy of Grammy-winning producer Dave Cobb, first-call LA guitarist Josh Smith's guide to the perfect session and a tale of how digital modelling can be the answer to your sonic prayers.

Do you have a recording that you are particularly proud of that you'd like us to hear? Maybe you are a studio veteran with sage advice of your own to share. Write to us via theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com and we'll print our favourites. In the meantime, enjoy this month's mag and I'll see you next time.

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## THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

**DAVE HUNTER**

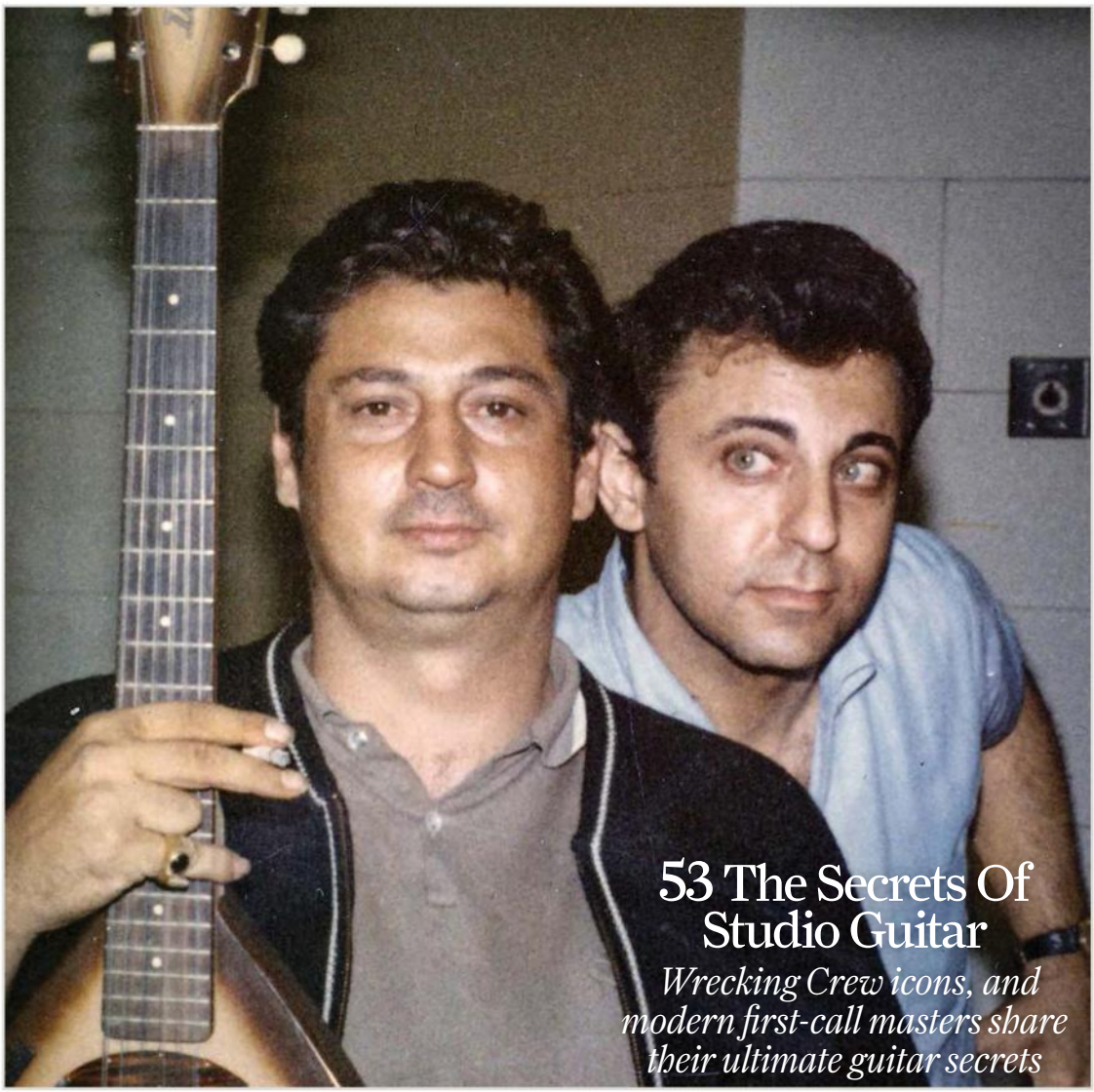
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

**HUW PRICE**

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

**BOB HEWITT**

For three decades, Bob Hewitt has interviewed and taken pictures of some of the world's greatest musicians – as well as producing two films on the history of Fender guitar. This month, Bob reflects on the life of Wrecking Crew legend, Tommy Tedesco on p50

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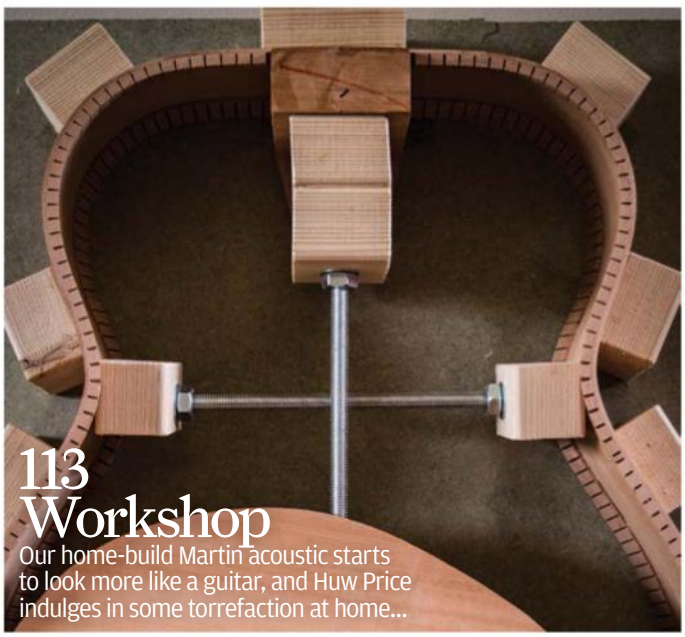


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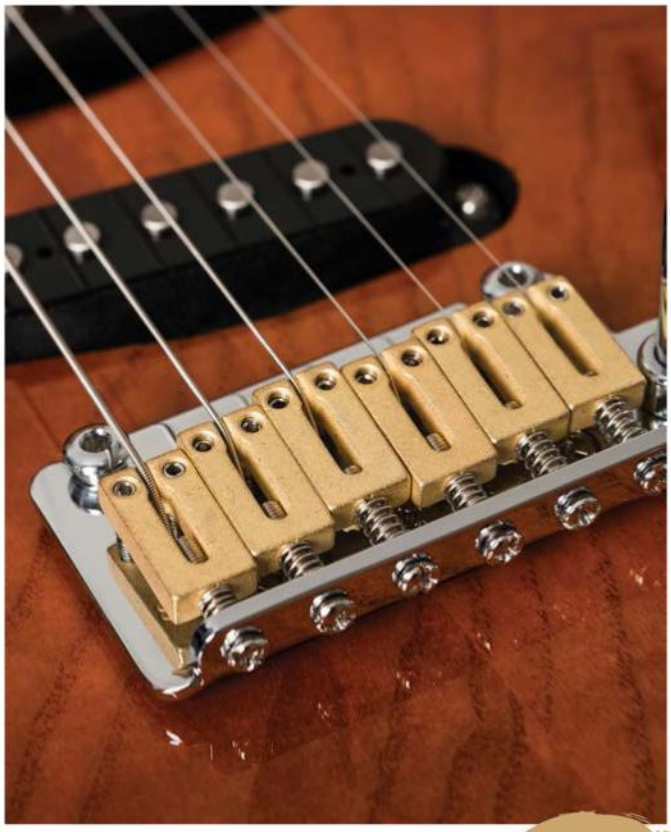
THE *Money Shot*

# PRISMA GUITARS THE SYNDICATE

Now here's something a little bit different. The brainchild of luthier Nick Pourfard, Prisma Guitars are handbuilt in San Francisco, California, and their unique and eye-catching looks come from the fact that the guitars are made from wood taken from used and broken skateboards, some of which are donated by local skaters whose decks have reached the end of their useful lives.

The Syndicate guitar we have here is one of Prisma's most striking instruments, and features a double-cut alder body with rock maple 'bookmatched' skateboard top – each ply of rock maple is dyed before being pressed together, giving the striking striped effect that adorns the top. Asides from the unconventional looks, the rest of the guitar is pretty special, too. Under the hood, the McNelly x Prisma Skate Stagger Swagger P-90-style pickups feature the same stripey maple as the top, while the guitar also makes use of top quality parts from the likes of Emerson, TonePros and Graph Tech.

This particular guitar is in stock in the UK at James' Home Of Tone for £2,450, but if you want it you'd better be quick – due to the nature of the way these guitars are built, every one is slightly different, so once this one's gone, it's gone! For more information on this guitar, visit www.homeoftone.co.uk

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# WIN A Chapman ML1 Traditional electric guitar

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Chapman Guitars are one of the big success stories of modern British guitar. The brand was originally the vision of YouTube star Rob Chapman, who had the idea to create an affordable range of guitars specifically tailored to the needs of the modern guitarist by using feedback and ideas from his huge online following.

The initial results, which appeared in 2009, were so successful that the first guitars sold out in a matter of months. In the short number of years since, the Chapman Guitars brand has gone from strength to strength, expanding the range of guitars offered to satisfy a number of different price points while continuing to refine and improve the concept of the designs. What's more, customer feedback is still at the heart of what Chapman does, with design aspects of new guitar runs being put up for the public vote.

The guitar we're giving away here is the modern interpretation of that first ever Chapman crowd-designed guitar, the ML1. The ML1 Traditional is a tweaked S-type design intended to cover a wide range of styles. This ash-bodied instrument has a gloss-finished ash veneer top with contouring for player comfort and a prominent cutaway for ease of access to the maple neck, which has rolled fingerboard edges.

Pickup-wise, Chapman guitars use the company's own-brand pickup, and the ML-1 Traditional sports a classic layout of three Venus Witch Zero single coil alnico pickups, which Chapman says can be used for every style of music from blues to classic rock to metal and beyond.

For more information about Chapman Guitars, visit www.chapmanguitars.co.uk, and to be in with a chance of winning the guitar we have to give away this month, simply answer the question below and head to the following link.

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***Q What's the name of the band fronted by Chapman Guitars founder, Rob Chapman?***

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# FEELGOOD INC

For nearly three decades, Steve Walwyn has held down the groove as guitarist in Dr Feelgood. **LARS MULLEN** visited his home to get up close with his guitar collection, and hear him eulogise on his love of Leo Fender's plank...

Even before he joined Dr Feelgood 28 years ago, Steve Welwyn was a Telecaster devotee. It would have been awkward if he hadn't been really – after all, ever since Wilko Johnson, the Tele has been the unflinching bedrock of one of Britain's finest rhythm and blues bands ever, and remains so today.

"I just love Telecasters", says Steve, "Especially when it has to work hard in a three-piece. I've played Teles throughout my career, and since '89 when I first joined Dr Feelgood, nothing's changed sonically since the birth of the band in '71, there's no stroking the strings, it's full on.

"Like so many guitar players into blues or rock during the 70s, I'd been listening to the likes of Peter Green and Rory Gallagher. But it all changed in '75 when a friend started kicking my door down saying 'you gotta hear this'.

"He had a copy of *Down By The Jetty*, the first Dr Feelgood album. I distinctly remember how we were both excited that it was in mono, which I'm sure at the time enhanced that distinctive British R&B sound. I was blown away by Wilko Johnson's choppy, tight rhythm playing. It was such a raw, tight three-piece sound, augmented by Lee Brilleaux's distinctive vocals and harmonica. I've still got that vinyl album to this day.

It's entirely appropriate, then, that someone so enamoured with Wilko's playing would end up sitting in his chair one day, but his move to Feelgood didn't come totally out of the blue...

"I'd known the original line-up personally before I joined, having opened up for them several times playing in Steve Marriott's band The DTs," Steve explains. "I've been the guitarist in Dr Feelgood now for 28 years, I'm actually the 5th guitar player.

*Opposite page* **Steve with 'The Plank' and one of his most recent arrivals, a Rob Williams T-style**

*Above* **A pair of Steve's Japan-made Fender Teles – the Candy Apple Red is a frequent live workhorse**

VOX

TELECASTER

Wilko Johnson was the first of course, then Gypie Mayo, Johnny Guitar, Gordon Russell and then myself – the longest running guitarist."

## Walk The Plank

When it comes to guitars, his main Dr Feelgood instrument should come as no surprise – and it's one that has some famous admirers...

"I had a great talk with Joe Strummer from The Clash about how the Feelgood's fast pace had a strong influence on him and indeed, the punk movement," Steve recalls. "Joe actually wanted to buy my '67 Telecaster, which I'd bought second hand from an advert in the back of the *Melody Maker* in 1976. It was my first American Fender and when I took it to a Feelgood rehearsal on Canvey Island, Lee Brilleaux took one look and said, 'I like your guitar it's just a plank innit?' It's been known as The Plank ever since.

The Plank's distinctive stripped-down look wasn't something that Steve did himself, but he embraces its long, hard life on the road.

"It had already been taken back to the wood when I bought it," he confirms. "There's a tell-tale patch of the original blonde colour under the scratchplate. It's distressed to say the least and it's all natural from hard gigging literally around the world. In the early days we were gigging up to 250 gigs a year. You can see how gallons of sweat have raised the grain on the back over the years, along with a blue patch from wearing denim while I play it.

*"I love this Tele to bits, it's such a workhorse and always in tune. It's been dropped many times..."*

"I love this Tele to bits, it's such a workhorse and always in tune. It's been dropped many times, the headstock was split and repaired a while and ago. I also drove my car over it and broke the neck. I'd left it against the front bumper, the silence in the car was deafening as I drove forward and heard the crack..."

*Opposite page* **'The Plank' is a '67 Telecaster – it was originally blonde, but the finish was taken off before Steve bought it –he's used it for much of his Dr Feelgood career, but recently retired the well-worn workhorse**

*Above* **Steve built both of these T-style guitars – the white scratchplate model was a partscaster job, but he created the blackguard from scratch, shaping the body, neck and 'board himself from ash, walnut and ovangkol respectively**

*Left* **The Rob Williams T-style guitar is one of Steve's most recent acquisitions, while the striking personalised thinline Flying Finn guitar is made by Finnish luthier, Matti Nevalainen**

*Top right* **Steve played a double-neck in his first band, and bought this 70s Arbiter SG-type on eBay as a "flashback moment", he also has the single-necked Arbiter from 1972**

*Bottom right* **This unique steel-bodied guitar is known as 'Dr Phill' and was built for Steve as a gift by French metalworker, Jean-Philippe Fally**

As befits a guitar with so many miles on the clock, its had to have some tender loving care over the years as various eccentricities have developed electronically. "The bridge pickup used to feed back a lot, this wasn't the original," he recalls. "I tried a lot of different replacements, finally settling on this one made by Mark Foley Guitar Products. It's as near as possible to a '67 Tele bridge pickup, right down to the gauge of the wire, windings and the size of the magnets.

*"I drove my car over it and broke the neck. The silence in the car was deafening as I heard the crack..."*

## Working Wood

Despite its long years of service, Steve can't bring himself to take The Plank out much any more, and as such he's got a few alternatives in his rack.

"The Plank is now 50 years old, and has more or less been retired," he confirms. "To celebrate we held 'Plankstock' in Southam back in September with a host of guest musicians. As The Plank gigs less and less, I have several stage Telecasters all fighting for position one. I've been using a Candy Apple '85 model for a while now. It's actually Japanese – built when Fender shifted production overseas. I bought it not long after I joined Feelgood, it does everything a Tele should. Close behind and often in front, is my natural Tele with a white Scratchplate – it's actually a clone of The Plank called 'Plank'. It's actually a partscaster, which I put together myself."

The latter is evidence of one of Steve's other passions, and on a rare day off from touring, he can be found up to his knees in wood shavings.

"I love working with wood," says Steve, "I have a collection of old hand tools, some of the planes are over a hundred years old and are as good if not better than some of the modern ones. I built the other natural Tele-type guitar with the black guard myself. This wasn't from assembled parts, I cut and shaped the body from

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SLAVES

# OFFSET

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*Left* **Steve's Springett Gemini III with Floyd Rose and ornate binding, and a Burns Flyte he saved from the scrapheap**

*Bottom right* **Steve likes his Les Pauls stripped down, and he's a big fan of the Special and double-cut Junior models**

a piece of ash, used walnut to make the neck, and ovangkol for the fingerboard. I loaded it with one Tele pickup. I call this my Smuggler Esquire, as it has body cavities themed on the Teles Fender made in '67, which led to the creation of the Thinline in '68."

Despite his affinity for making things out of wood, however, Steve isn't afraid to use guitars made of more unconventional materials, such as his eye-catching metal-bodied T-style.

"This beats them all when it comes to cavities!" he jokes. "It's basically two sheets of steel spaced apart and riveted together, built by a French metalworker called Jean-Philippe Fally, who also makes guitars. He came to one of our gigs in France and said that I'd been an inspiration to him for the last 20 years, and gave me this guitar called 'Dr Phill'. It has huge resonator properties, hence it's been my number one for slide work for a while now."

*"I'm partial to a P-90. The Gibson Les Paul Special is just a great sound – like an angry Fender"*

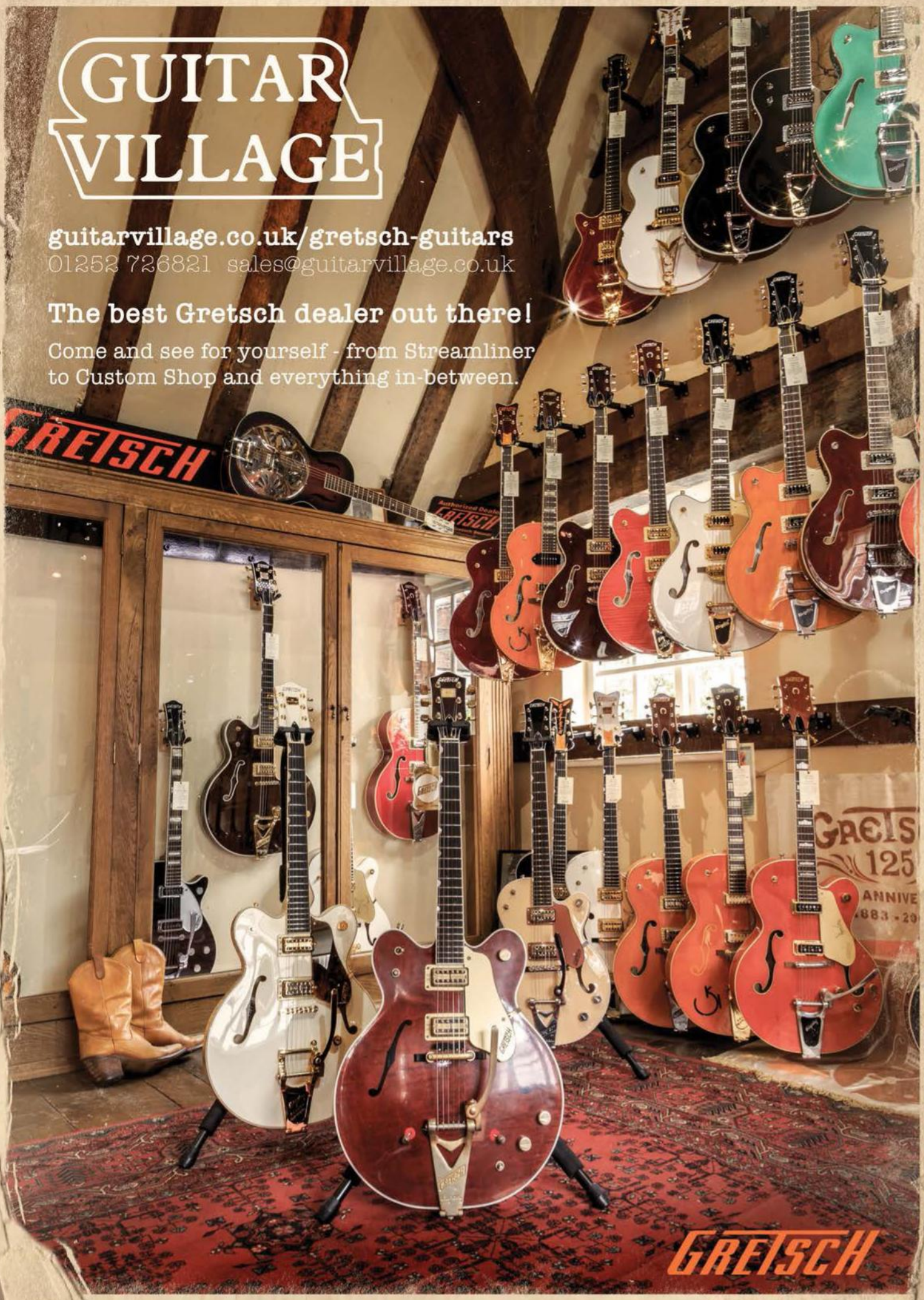
## Les Is More

It's not just Telecaster-style electrics that get Steve's juices flowing, of course, but when it comes to Gibson's most famous solidbody design, he still favours something with a more stripped down vibe.

"While I'm a devoted single-coil Tele man, I'm also partial to a great sounding P-90, which has the edge without entering humbucker territory," he explains. "The Les Paul Special and a double-cutaway Junior are fine examples. I also bought these when I joined Dr Feelgood and used the Special a few times in the early days, just a great sound – like an angry Fender."

It wouldn't be a guitar collection without Fender's most famous creation, and Steve's selection of S-types are a varied bunch.

"For me at least, as a total Tele nut, a Strat isn't far behind," he admits. "I have four at the moment,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*Top left* **The four-string Stevo Stradocaster and Triple-O-Caster were both built from scratch by Steve and were heavily inspired by violin shapes**

*Bottom left* **Steve's non-electric collection features a Framus Texan acoustic that he's had since the 70s, a Martin D-28, a Fender F-120 and an Antoria mandolin**

*Right* **This 1974 Woolworth Top 20 was Steve's first ever electric guitar**

including a really nice sounding Fiesta Red Squier and an ESP, which I used for a long time set up for slide before I acquired Dr Phill. My black Strat is actually the first guitar I made in '87, again from scratch – this time from accurate working diagrams I made of a '57 Strat a friend loaned me. I cut the body shape from a large piece of alder, the neck is maple and I used rosewood for the fingerboard. I used this guitar, along with an amp I built, on my solo album called *Instinct To Survive* released in 2015. It's one of a couple I keep at home – I must say it's great to have them all here out of storage for this feature!"

One Steve's S-types is a bit different from the rest, however, and is very much a product of its time...

"The same time I was building the black Strat, I commissioned Nick Springett to build this Springett Gemini III. This was around the Van Halen period when Floyd Rose vibratos and roller nuts were appearing on all sorts of guitars, so I thought I'd better follow suit! It has both Strat and Tele influences, hence the body shape and scratchplate design. I asked Nick to add some fine details which are evident within the bound fingerboard and body bindings."

*"My Burns Flyte was destined for oblivion in pieces in the corner of a shop way back in the 70s"*

### Saved From The Chopping Block

Steve's passion for modding and creating his own instruments continues as we move into the more esoteric guitars in his collection, including a Burns Flyte he saved from an early demise in the 1970s.

"That's far from original," he chuckles. "It was destined for oblivion in pieces in the corner of a shop way back in the 70s. I made a lot of the metal parts and sprayed it metallic midnight blue. I use it regularly tuned in open A for slide work."

Steve's woodworking talent can also be seen with a pair of unique four-string instruments.

"I carved the body for my four-string violin guitar from the exact plans of the original Stradivarius Messiah designed over 300 years ago," he enthuses. "I thought it was such a wonderful shape and selected a nice piece of ash for the body which I French polished and I made the hardware out of brass. I call this one the 'Stevo Stradocaster'. I also made this other four-string I call a 'Triple-O-Caster', this one has the inner four strings of a normal guitar tuned down a tone."

One of Steve's more recent unconventional guitars is one that harks back to his early gigging days...

"I played a double-neck in my first band, so you could say this Arbiter double-neck dating from the early 70s is a bit of a flashback moment," he explains. "This was an eBay purchase, it looked suspiciously clean in the photo, but it hadn't really been out of the box since new. The quality is outstanding from back in the day when so many brands from Asia were proving that they could make great guitars."

## First Loves

Among his classic-inspired electrics, the Woolworth electric (made by Teisco) stands out, and rightly so – as it's perhaps the most important guitar Steve ever played.

"It's my first guitar," he explains. "It's a plywood bodied Top 20 from 1974. I actually did a load of gigs with this one. It's had the middle pickup added. I'm glad I've kept hold of it, lots of memories in there."

It's a rare thing if a guitar collector doesn't have a favoured acoustic or three, and Steve is no different.

"I've written a lot of songs on this Framus Texan acoustic, which I've had since the 70s," Steve notes. "But my favourite is the Martin D-28. I bought it off a pal who purchased it from Mandolin Bros in New York. It sounds like the acoustic you hear on all your favourite records, that says it all really. Then there's my Antoria mandolin, which has a Rory Gallagher link – it was his track *Going To My Home Town* that inspired me to purchase it."

## Digging Dirt

Although extensive touring with Dr Feelgood takes up most of his time, somehow Steve also finds time to front The Dirt Road Blues Band – a project that's also given him the excuse to have a new guitar made for the occasion.

"I have a new guitar built by Rob Williams," explains a visibly excited Steve. "It arrived just in time for the opening gig of The Dirt Road Blues Band. I asked Rob to feature all the good points of a Tele and a Les Paul Junior and was knocked out when this arrived. I'm still blown away every time I pick it up. The Tele concept is there with the body shape in swamp ash, bridge, saddles and pickup, while the Gibson influences include the maple top and glued-in neck, which is angled away from the body with a P-90 at the neck.

"Rob wound both pickups which sound wonderful clean or with overdrive. The chamfered heel offers easy access up the top end of the fretboard, not that I wander up there that much. I'm using this on the new album by The Dirt Road Blues Band which is underway. Like my role in Dr Feelgood, I have a free reign to play full-on blues rock, although I keep to the original guitar parts in songs like *Roxette*, *Back In the Night* or *She Does It Right* – they're the classics!"

## BOXING CLEVER

For that tight, focused Dr Feelgood guitar sound, Steve keeps his rig to a minimum, as he explains...

"A cool valve amp and decent overdrive pedal is basically all I need. At the moment I'm using a hand-wired Marshall JTM45 30-watt head through a Marshall 4x12 cabinet with an overdrive pedal. I have the Marshall cooking nicely with all controls at 12 o'clock. I leave the pedal on all the time and just use the guitar volume as a master control.

"I'm also handy with electrics, so when I saw a '63 Vox AC30 in a skip, I just had to go for the big repair. It was also an exercise in restoration, as all I salvaged was a piece of the cabinet and the chassis minus valves, transformers and a lot of components. I got hold of some diagrams and a pair of unused 60s transformers from the Vox factory before it closed down and started the rebuild. I also made and covered a new cab. It worked first time, clear as a bell and loud. I learned that a large number of the components in an AC30 are just for the tremolo circuit.

"I actually have four AC30s – there's another from '63, which I've also worked on, and a pair of reissues. I've also made several amps from kits, including my five-watt 2x10 model in a pine cabinet. This sounds great with an overdrive pedal as does my little Cornell combo, which was actually Lee Brilleaux's harmonica amp. I've also just finished building a cab for my WEM Dominator from 1959."

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *The Guitar Magazine*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for a future issue

**DAVE HUNTER**

**Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster***


Letters from *America*

# DIVIDED BY 13 CCC 9/15

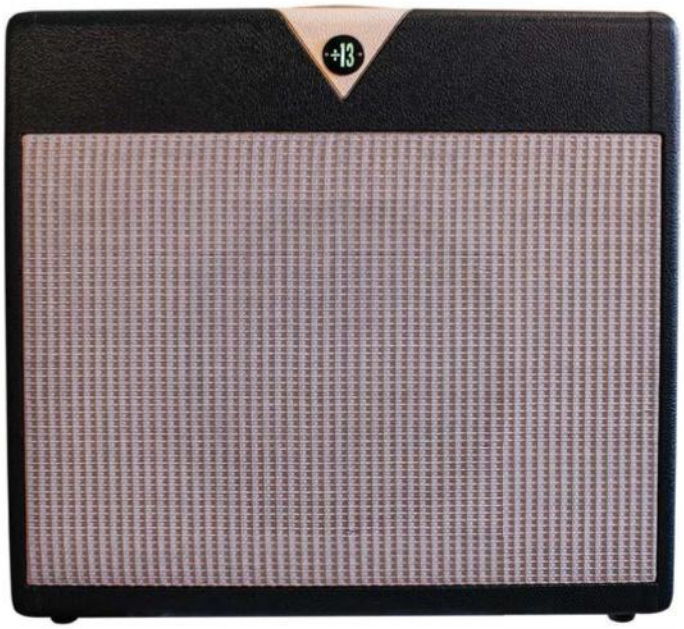
Divided By 13 is one of the US boutique amp market's big success stories. **DAVE HUNTER** finds out why Fred Taccone's amps have stood out from the crowd for so long...

Right from the start of his operation in the early 1990s, Divided By 13 founder and main-man (hell, only man) Fred Taccone decided to do things a little differently. He would never copy any existing design directly – as so many in the boutique-amp world were doing – he would keep his amps simple and tone-centric, and he would keep his operation simple, and small. The plan seems to have worked. As Taccone told me on the phone recently, "I haven't gotten rich, but I've done okay. I'm still here." Among the hallmarks of Divided By 13's several models is a propensity for versatile, switchable output stages, a relative dearth of control knobs compared to many other makes, a virtuosity of construction, and a stylish and original look, courtesy of the 'widow's peak' two-tone coverings, some bold choices in Tolex colour, and a nifty backlit '÷13' logo plate.

Taccone's deep understanding of guitar amps comes in large part from using them himself, as a member of LA hardcore band D.I., who toured the USA and Europe in the early 1980s and even made a brief appearance in the 1984 Penelope Spheeris cult film *Suburbia*, and in the studio as both a guitarist and recording engineer for several years after. Regardless, Taccone had a tremendous technical pedigree: growing up in Fullerton, California, with a father who was a top aerospace engineer, he studied electronics, business, and recording engineering in college, and worked for both Fender and Music Man in the days when the likes of Leo Fender, Don Randall, Forrest White and Doc Kauffman were still roaming the production floor. Tech work for local artists in the late 80s and early 90s, coupled with a desire to 'settle down' – largely inspired by his having made the acquaintance of his future wife, Sarra – eventually led to designing and building amps himself.

Even before the Divided By 13 artist roster started to read like a who's who of first-call guitarists, one of Taccone's first big-name clients helped to shape the design direction of his amp line-up. Rusty Anderson – already a SoCal person of interest but not yet the guitar star he would be after getting the call to join Paul McCartney's band in 2001 – signed up Taccone as his amp tech, and much of that revolved around rebuilding the quirky 50s Gibson GA-40 Les Paul amps that the guitarist was then fond of. During this work, Taccone met the GA-40's 5879 pentode, a fat, juicy preamp tube that's kind of a kissing cousin of the EF86 that was being used by Vox and Selmer in Britain in the late 50s and early 60s, and which he has used in several models since. And it was also while messing with another amp brought in by Anderson that he undertook the divine little experiment that led to his use of dual output stages in several of his amps. "I had built several amps for Rusty, and he brought in one that he didn't like as much as the others,"

*It's easy to dial in a range of classic voices, all with excellent clarity and note detail, and lovely dimension*




**KEY FEATURES**

## Divided By 13 CCC 9/15

- **PRICE** £1,835 (excluding shipping and duties)
- **OUTPUT** 9W Class A with 6V6GTs, 15W class AB1 with EL84s
- **TUBES** 2x 12AX7 preamp tubes, 2x EL84 output tubes; 5AR4 rectifier
- **CONTROLS** Volume (with pull boost), treble, bass, master
- **SPEAKER** Celestion G12H-30
- **FEATURES** Speaker outputs for 4-, 8- and 16-ohm loads
- **WEIGHT** 48lbs/21.7kg
- **DIMENSIONS** 559 x 540 x 267mm
- **CONTACT** info@dividedby13.com www.dividedby13.com

Taccone relates. "I got an idea to try something, and added a pair of EL84s to some spare holes in the chassis, and a switch so that you could select between either the two 6V6GTs or the two EL84s for output."

In short, Taccone liked the results – he liked them a lot. The idea was further refined with custom power and output transformers that could adequately handle the demands of the dual-output-stage design, and first (and perhaps most famously) put into production in Divided By 13's JRT 9/15 combo, which uses a 5879 pentode preamp stage for a thick, driving tone. Lesser seen, however, is the CCC 9/15 variant, which we're looking at here. It has a more common 12AX7 preamp stage, but also a few other interesting twists along with it to make it an extremely creative combo. The dual/independent output stages lend considerable versatility to these amps, and do so in quite the reverse of most 'switchable-stage' designs, which achieve their variation through multiple preamps.

The interesting thing is, they achieve this naturally. Taccone points out that in supplying both sets of tubes with the same B+ levels of around 300 volts DC, the EL84s are operating right in their wheelhouse – producing around 15 watts, and likely somewhat more, in cathode-biased Class AB1 – while the 6V6s are operating significantly below their capabilities, and can therefore be biased hot into true Class A, yielding only around nine to 11 watts. In addition to achieving two distinct voices from the amp, the dichotomy provides safe and natural high-power/low-power modes, available at the flip of a sturdy toggle switch.

The 12AX7-based preamp coupled to this is a pretty straightforward affair, but one that has been designed for optimum tone and playing feel. Voiced somewhat like a Blackface Fender Princeton (but by no means limiting the amp's performance to that realm), it has a single volume control plus treble and bass controls – the EQ stage sandwiched between the first gain stage and a gain make-up stage from the same dual-triode preamp tube – with a pull-boost switch on the volume pot, and a master control. That's it. A look beneath the back panel that covers the chassis confirms the robust build quality upon which Taccone has staked his reputation, and the cab itself is a sturdy affair, too. Constructed of void-less birch ply, with a double-layer speaker baffle, it's a decent-sized 1x12, and weighs in at 48lbs loaded with its single Celestion G12H-30 speaker.

I'm testing the CCC 9/15 with a Les Paul, a Strat-like Novo Serus S, and a Heatley Parisienne with P-90s, and it's a lively, responsive, and great-sounding

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**The versatile CCC 9/15 is as carefully and meticulously finished inside as it is handsome and stylish outside**

amp from every perspective. It can sound surprisingly big and loud for a 1x12 15-watter, but its master volume control (something its sibling the JRT 9/15 lacks) performs very well and doesn't hamper the tone much when dialled down to about a 60 per cent reduction, at which point it still sounds big – in the sense of sonic fullness – but significantly less loud.

Even with such a simple control array, it's easy to dial in a range of classic cornerstone voices, from pushed-tweed, to cleanish Blackface, to chiming and driving British – all with excellent clarity and note detail, and lovely dimension and body once clipping begins dishing out the harmonic overtones. It's worth adding that while the unboosted mode sounds good and tight and spanky for ultra-clean work, I enjoy the boost (volume pot pulled out) so much that I rarely disengage it once I discover its charms.

Overall, though, the CCC 9/15 is very much its own thing – an extremely stout, dynamic tonal platform for whatever you'd like to throw at it. And with that, it's also an excellent pedal platform, and one that will cut the gig beautifully at a

wide range of venue sizes. For overdrive and distortion, it loves an Xotic BB Preamp, a Gas FX Drive Thru, a JHS Angry Charlie, and a Keeley D&M Drive, all of which interact seamlessly, yet appealingly differently, with both 6V6GT and EL84 modes. The former really does drop output volume noticeably, and would make this amp more usable in smaller rooms, while inducing a somewhat darker, saggier tone and feel. The EL84 mode is bolder, brasher, and more immediate, with lots of sparkle and chime, yet also plenty of sweetness and a delectable edge to its breakup when pushed. It also delivers more low-end punch than most people associate with these tubes. Long story short, it's a hip and appealing 'club-sized' amp, and I like it a lot.

All of which leaves us with just one question: why 'Divided By 13'? Some mathematical formula for harmonic bliss, or a stealthy lateral approach to the 'golden ratio'? According to Taccone, the answer is far simpler: "It just popped into my head, and I thought it looked cool. It was 1992, so..."

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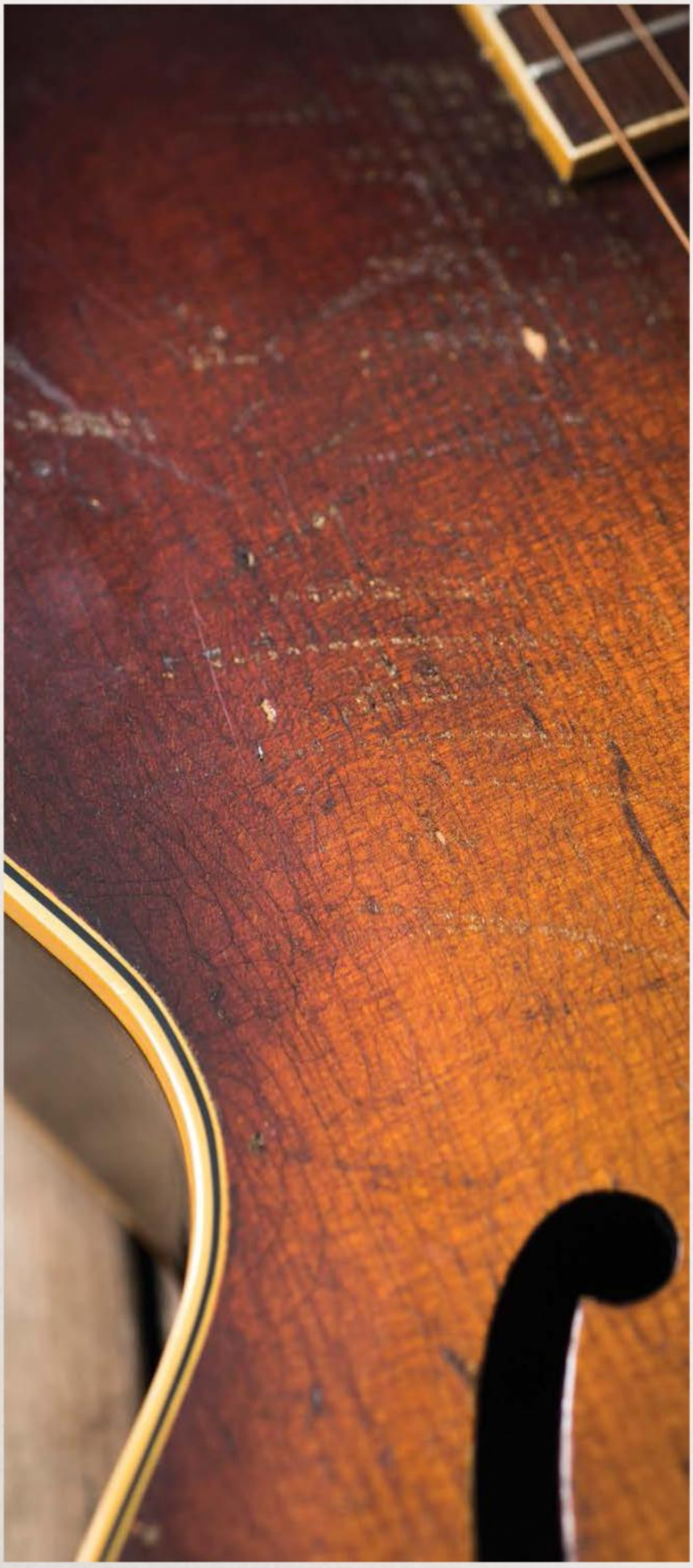
Vintage BENCH TEST

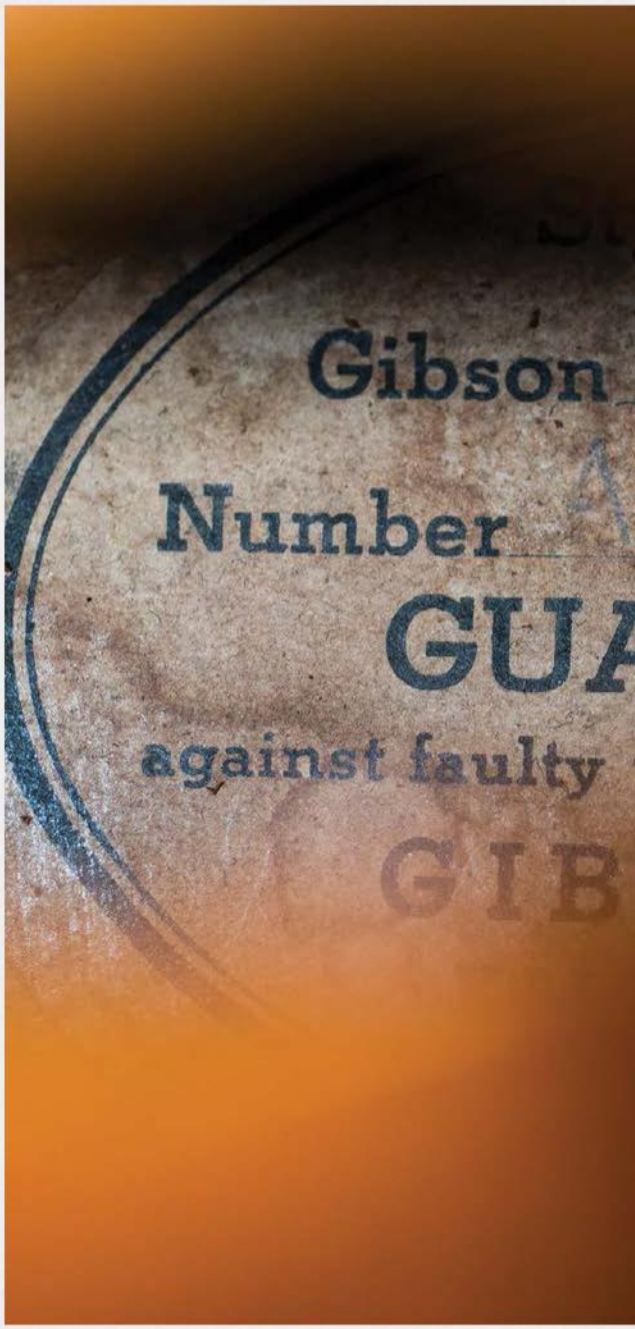
# BURSTING FORTH

It may appear old and tired but this Gibson is fighting fit and ready for action. **HUW PRICE** gets to grips with a late-1940s workhorse that's still punching its weight nearly 70 years after it came out of Kalamazoo...

In guitar terms, 'pre-war' is generally applied to instruments made before the Second World War, but the Gibson L-4 model was first introduced before the First World War. The example we've got here isn't quite that old but it was certainly made before the rock 'n' roll era. Based on the FON code under the treble side f-hole, the serial number on the white oval label under the bass side f-hole and the 'kissing dot' headstock logo, we would place this guitar's date of manufacture around the latter half of 1948.

In a sense, this L-4 was something of an anachronism even when it was brand new, because Gibson began making electrics during the 1930s and jazz payers were moving in that direction by the late 1940s. Although Gibson phased out the L-4 in 1956, the basic style and shape of the late L-4 and

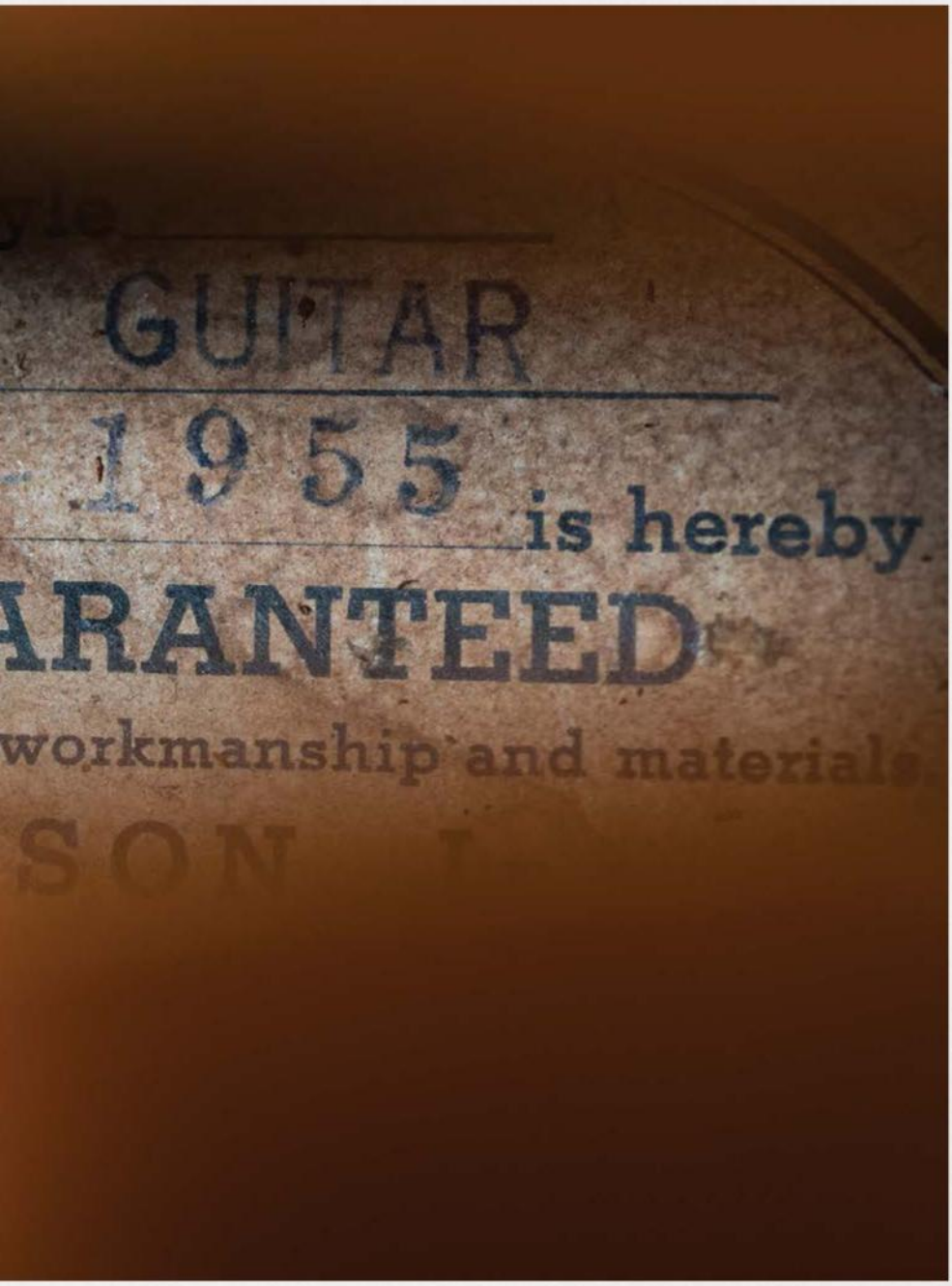





L-4C (cutaway) models carried over to the P-90-equipped ES-175 – along with the trapezoid position markers and matching tailpiece.

The only significant structural difference between the ES-175 and the cutaway L-4 is the top. Gibson dampened things down with a laminated top for electrification, but the L-4 was always a bona fide acoustic with a carved solid spruce archtop. Collectors may be interested to note that Gibson produced a limited run of twenty L-4-CES guitars in 1958 with various pickup options – including humbuckers and 'Charlie Christians'. A few more were shipped during 1969 and a double-humbucker version has been a fixture in Gibson's product line since 1987.

Opinions will differ on how this guitar's condition should be described. On the one hand, it's somewhat battle scarred and the finish is covered in

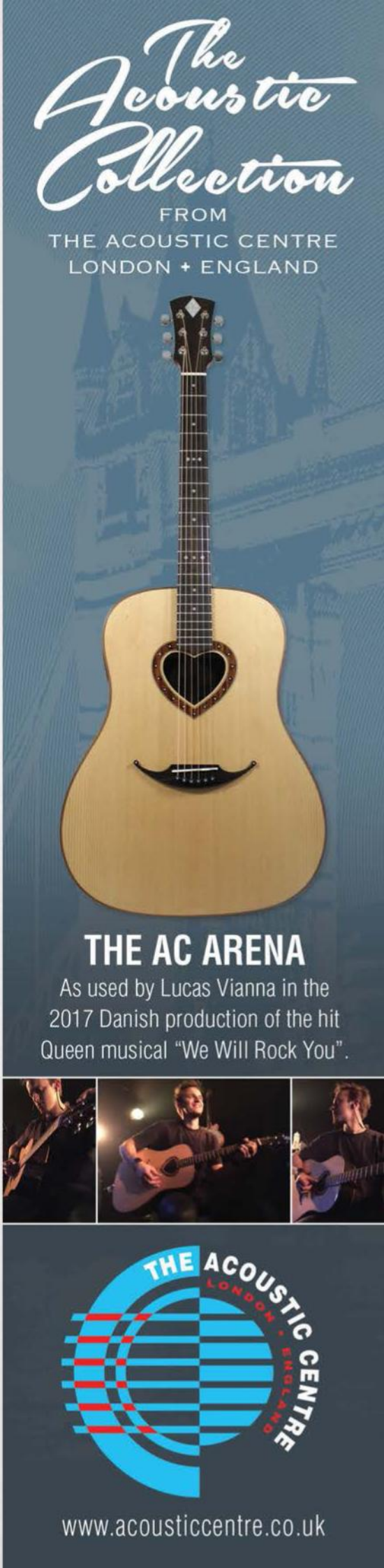


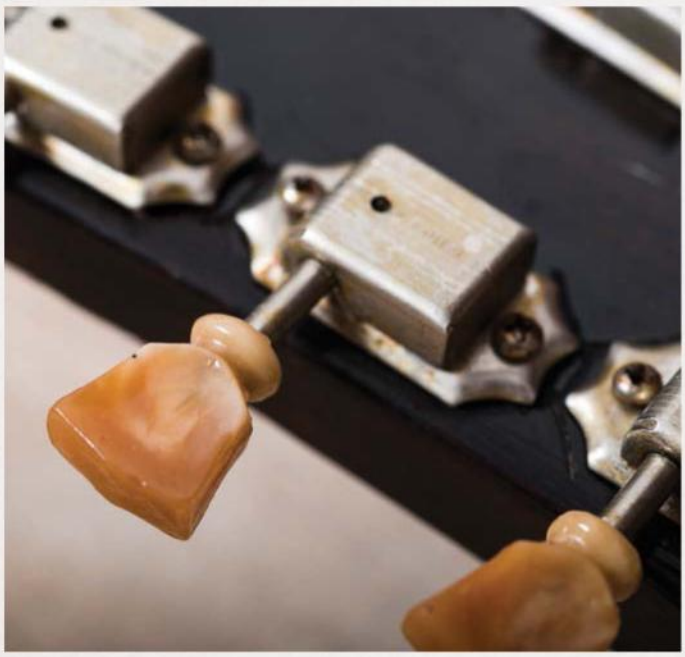

crazing, scratches and rub through. On the other, there are no cracks, splits or serious dents, and it's in extremely fine fettle structurally. Although there's a very slight gap at the base of the heel, the neck angle is still good and playability is uncompromised – as we'll discover later.

There is one poorly executed binding 'repair' adjacent to the nut on the bass side. It's about a centimetre in length and we initially thought it might be some epoxy glue. However closer inspection revealed it's actually candle wax. Three of the parallelogram markers have fallen off the 'board, but the owner has two of them and no doubt they'll be back in place before too long.

The tuners may look old but we think they're replicas – most likely Fake '58s with shrunken buttons. Although the style is period-correct for a late 1940s L-4, Kluson didn't introduce the single

*Above* **The guitar's serial number and some cosmetic factors date it to the later half of 1948**





*Above* **The shrunken tuners aren't actually original, despite appearances – they're vintage Kluson replicas – while the binding repair has been done with, of all things, candle wax**

line lettering on the gear case until 1956. But that's almost it so far as non-originality is concerned, because the nickel tailpiece, four-ply pickguard, bracket and nylon nut are all genuine.

The rosewood bridge base is correct, too, but an ebony bridge with an integrated pickup sits atop the thumbwheels and the leadout wire passes into the body via a small hole drilled into the bridge base. It's a passive system, so the output socket is mounted through the tail block, replacing the original strap button.

All things considered, this guitar is in pretty good shape for its age and although there are cleaner examples out there, this L-4 certainly isn't lacking in character. The sunburst's original colour graduation survives best on the guitar's back, with a distinct band of cherry visible.

*"Although there are cleaner examples out there, this L-4 certainly isn't lacking in character"*

In contrast, the front has mellowed to a dark and rich amber with shaded edges that show the grace of age. The back of the neck is a dark tobacco brown and although there is some playwear, most of the nitro is intact and the headstock has never needed any repairs.

## In Use

Sonically speaking, this is a tale of two guitars – the one you hear when someone else is playing and the

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*Above* **The guitar's finish tells a story of plenty of hard playing, but it hasn't compromised the tone or playability**

one you can hear when you're playing it yourself. Such is the nature of the archtop acoustic because they were designed to cut through a morass of horns, drums and crooners during the pre-electric age.

The thing about the L-4 is that with its 16-inch wide body, it has never been particularly well regarded as a bandstand guitar. Nevertheless, its limited ability to generate very high sound pressure levels can hardly be seen as an issue in these days of high-quality pickups and stage microphones. What's more, the voicing has a subtlety and tonal range that eludes some big-bodied jazzboxes and makes the L-4 an enjoyable and versatile guitar.

*"The voicing has a subtlety and tonal range that eludes some big-bodied jazzboxes"*

Played in a regular sitting position the L-4 produces a sweet, mellow and dry woodiness. That said, the bass is a tad underpowered and the extended treble overtones you may commonly associate with spruce flat-tops simply isn't present. Instead you get very clear articulation, impressive string-to-string balance and a full and forward midrange – it's almost the acoustic antithesis of the sound of a 'smiley' EQ curve.

Flipping the body angle so it fires towards you can be compared to turning an imaginary volume control from five to 10. A hitherto undetected percussiveness also becomes apparent, along with

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The tailpiece is original, but the strap button has been replaced to make room for the pickup output

KEY FEATURES

## 1948 Gibson L-4

- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Carved solid spruce top, mahogany back and sides, glued-in mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, parallelogram markers, 19 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage Kluson replicas
- **ELECTRICS** Aftermarket piezo
- **FINISH** 3-tone sunburst nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 630mm/24.8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 52.65mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 26mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.25kg/4.96lbs

extra upper midrange that lends some forcefulness and aggression. After some experimentation, we find the best way to experience the true tone, from a player's perspective, is to face into a corner, Robert Johnson-style. Get in tight and you hear more treble and fuller bass, or move further out to balance the bass and mellow things out.

As we would expect from a Gibson of this era, the rounded neck profile is full but supremely

*"The best way to experience the true tone is to face into a corner, Robert Johnson-style"*

comfortable and the playing feel has more in common with an electric than a typical acoustic. Some vintage guitars feel old fashioned and demand adaptations in playing technique, but the L-4 plays effortlessly and simply feels 'right'.

In addition to acoustic jazz and swing styles, the L-4 is well suited to blues, slide and traditional country playing. A quick glance on Reverb suggests L-4s of this era are still relatively affordable, so if you fancy some old school f-hole acoustic, it's food for thought.

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Vintage TIME MACHINES

# 1963 GIBSON ES-330TD

From Keef to BB, the 330 has charmed guitarists of all kinds – we take a look at a well-loved 60s original...

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**1963 Gibson ES-330TD**

- **PRICE:** £3,995
- **MANUFACTURER:** Gibson
- **TYPE:** Hollowbody thinline electric
- **REVERB SELLER:** Primal Screens reverb.com/uk/shop/cc-music-1
- **SEE MORE:** reverb.com/item/6583464-gibson-es-330-td-1963-cherry

The Gibson ES-330 – or ES-330TD as it's officially known – has always been something of a middle child in the family of classic Gibson hollowbody and semi-hollowbody guitars. Lacking the wooden centre block that makes a semi-hollow a semi-hollow, the 330 has never been as revered or famous as the ES-335, and vintage prices tend to be a bit lower.

That said, this fully hollow thinline remains a classic in its own right, and one that makes an excellent fixture in any guitar collection or studio. It's open construction fosters a warm, organic tone adept at jazz, while the bite of those P-90s makes it a more than worthy rock guitar as well.

This example comes from an individual seller in London and is all-original. It has clearly been played a lot, and has the battle scars to show it, but retains the original features that would have been found on this guitar when it left Kalamazoo in 1963. As the seller puts it in their Reverb listing: "It's no museum piece! This guitar has worked for its keep. It could be renovated – but why spoil 54 years of graft and grit? This is the real thing."

*"It's no museum piece! This guitar has worked for its keep. But why spoil 54 years of graft and grit?"*

First introduced in 1959, the ES-330 was one of several new double-cutaway thinline models released by Gibson during this period. Apart from its fully hollow construction, the 330 was distinguished by its P-90 pickups – the 'D' for 'double' in the model name indicating that it had a pair of the famous units. In its original run, the ES-330's P-90s sported black plastic covers, but by the time this specimen was produced, they were switched to nickel. Chrome parts would arrive in '65.

Like its more famous sibling the ES-335, Cherry and Sunburst were the 330's most popular finishes, but less than 300 Natural examples – listed as the ES-330TDN – were also made during the first two years of production. Their relative scarcity tends to command a higher resale price but even in Cherry, a looker such as this example is a sound investment.

Epiphone's Gibson-made ES-330 variant the Casino is arguably even more famous. Vintage Casinos often sell at higher prices thanks to its association with a certain group of lads from Liverpool, not to mention The Rolling Stones, The Kinks and a host of other beat boomers.

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The COMBINATA is available in four colour choices – Adriatic Blue Metallic, Pomodoro Red Metallic, Toro Black Metallic and Autunno Burst. The Standard model features a compensated wraptail bridge, while the Deluxe Trem model sports a Duesenberg Les Trem II with a roller saddle bridge.

The COMBINATA is the evolution of a design with which followers of Dennis Fano should be very familiar. The larger and slightly offset body give the COMBINATA a shapely silhouette and more substantial feel. The chambered mahogany body features a German carve top (mahogany on metallics, maple on burst). The 25" scale maple set-neck sports the comfortably chunky "Rivolta C+" neck profile, with 24 medium jumbo frets and a bound rosewood fingerboard.

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**TONY BACON**

Tony Bacon writes books about guitars and guitarists: more at tonybacon.co.uk. His latest is *Electric Guitars Design And Invention* (Backbeat), which shows why electric guitars are the way they are



# BEGIN AGAIN

## Feeling uninspired? **TONY BACON** wonders if we could all do with getting back to the mindset we had when we first started playing...

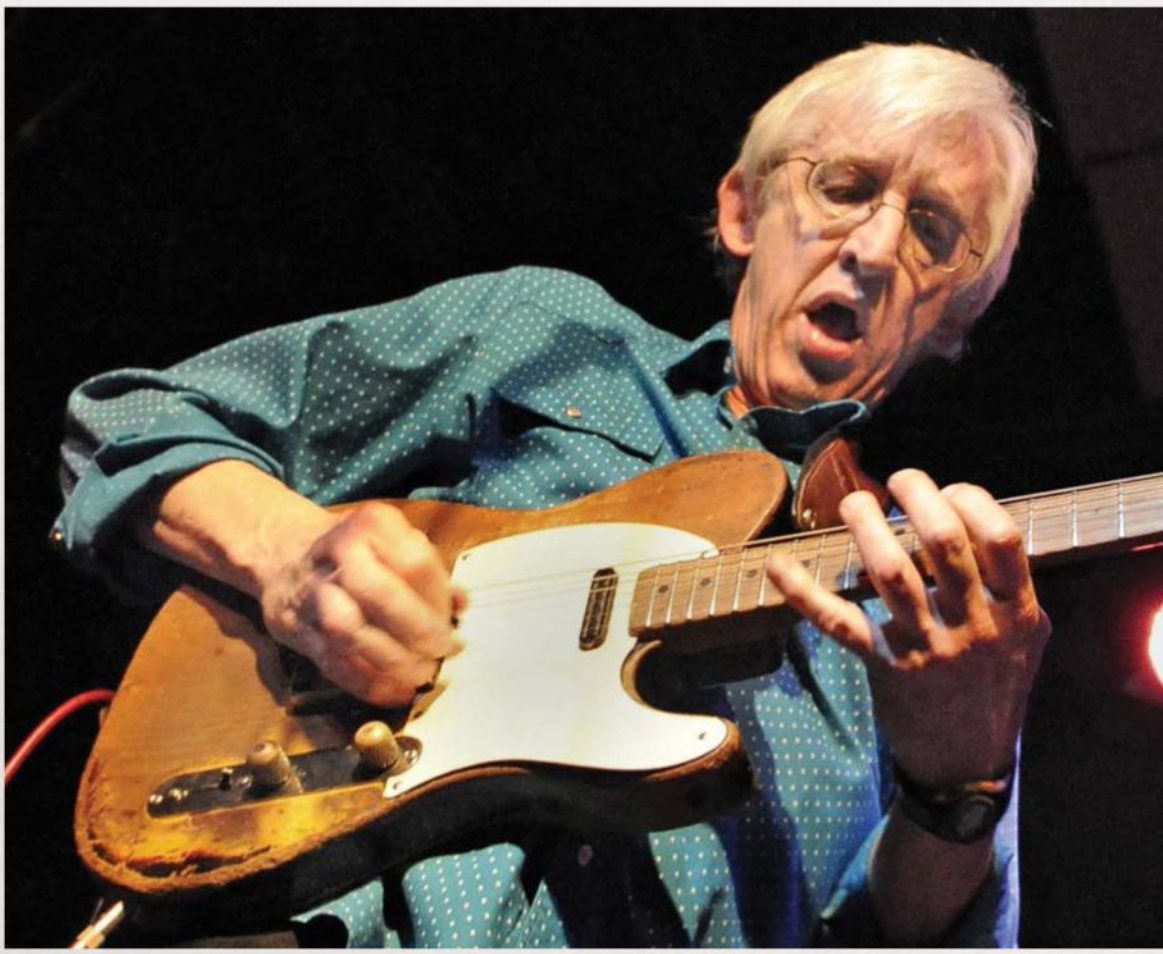
Isn't a new guitar, made with all the benefits of today's techniques and know-how, obviously better than an old one? Would you prefer an old black-and-white TV set or a big new flat-screen HDR model? For watching, not putting in the corner to admire. As I suspected.

But there's weird magic going on when you're lucky enough to pick up a genuine vintage guitar. That's one view, at least. Nonbelievers will tell you it's all in your mind, that a good guitar is a good guitar – whether it was made last week, last year, 50 years ago, and whatever the dealer might say in order to monetise this particular artefact of the past.

Old or new... it's like beginner or expert. Each can inform and even improve the other. Old pickups or an old-looking finish might do wonders for a new guitar (steer clear of old strings, though). A beginner's approach to the guitar might seem crude and off-beam, but if you can recreate the mindset you had back then, it might help your playing now. Consider this line from Shunryu Suzuki's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few." In other words, and rather oddly, getting better at something can actually be limiting.

"His music was aimed beyond his technique." That description of a fellow musician comes from an old book by George Melly, the late jazz singer. The book may be old, but the idea's bang up to date. *Owning Up* is about George's exploits in the 50s and early 60s in his revivalist jazz bands. Maybe you're not interested in revivalist jazz, but it's a great read. There's a shower of wisdom and wit within about the experience of being in a band, much of it as relevant now as it was when first published in 1965.

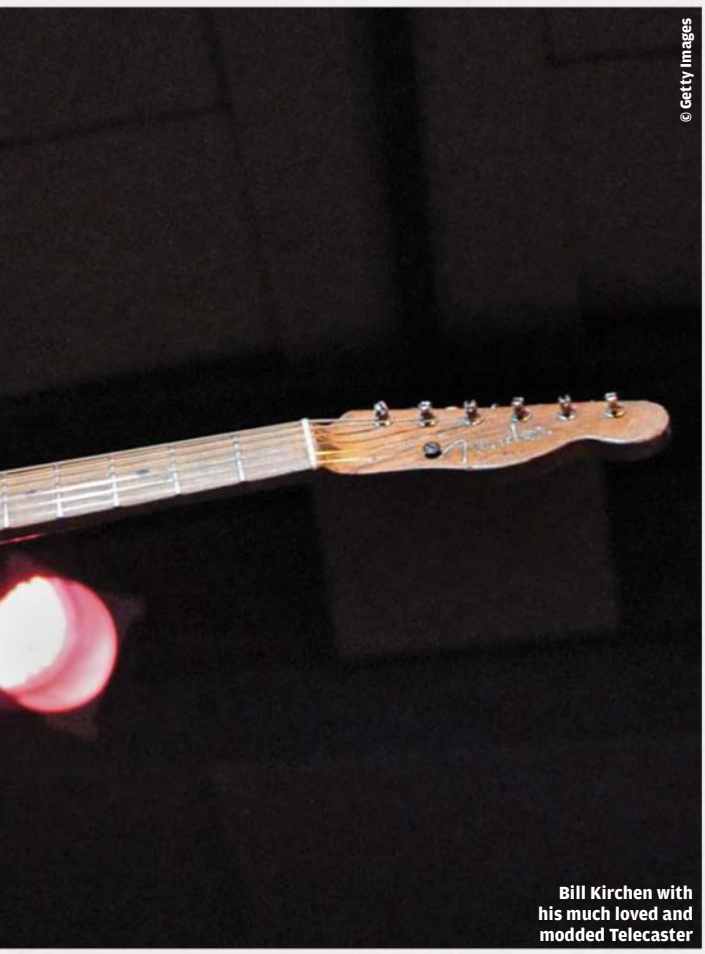
That opening remark was about a musician called Frank. "His music was aimed beyond his technique," George wrote. "Sometimes a very beautiful idea came off," he continued, "but more often you were aware of a beautiful idea which existed in Frank's head." Now that, I would guess, is familiar to most of us. If you have a beautiful idea



for a guitar part in your head, don't you sometimes have trouble getting it out accurately to the fingers? Sometimes it's almost as if your hands are refusing to translate the idea properly, as if they can't quite speak the language – or, at least, they don't know this particular phrase.

Ideas and technique; beginners and experts; old and new. One of the most mind-boggling old guitars I've ever seen and heard was Bill Kirchen's ancient Telecaster. You'll know about Bill if you're a Tele fan: played with Commander Cody & The Lost Planet Airmen in the 70s; did the fine Tele lead on their only hit, *Hot Rod Lincoln*, in '72; made a fantastic remake of that song 25 years later on *Hot Rod Lincoln Live!*, impersonating everyone from Buck Owens to The Sex Pistols in a brilliant guitar interlude. On both recordings he plays the same late-50s Tele that he traded for an SG around 1969. They've been inseparable ever since.

"My nickname for it is the coal-burner," Bill told me. "I tell people I've had it so long we had to convert it from coal power to electricity. Young kids are not exactly sure of their timelines and scratch their heads and think about that. The six ferrules that the strings run through are original, but every peg, screw, wire, strap button, pickup, and saddle has been changed numerous times. And yet to me it still sounds like a Telecaster. No matter what I change on that guitar, the sound inherent to that body is always there." I think the technique of a player as expert as Bill would sound good on anything he picked up – old, new, or anywhere between.



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Bill Kirchen with his much loved and modded Telecaster


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Why I *Love My...*

# 1991 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD

**ALAN NIMMO, KING KING**

The King King guitarist tells us why his trusty Les Paul has been by his side since he was a teenager...

**1 What I love...**
"I love my 1991 Wine Red Gibson Les Paul Standard, because all my favourite players used one of these – Kossoff, Peter Green, Gary Moore, Brian Robertson and so on..."

**2 It's been with me since...**
"It was the guitar that my mum bought for me when I was 15 years old, because she knew I wanted to play guitar for the rest of my life, so she decided that I should have a guitar that would last the same amount of time as me!"

© Mike Prior

**3 It's special because...**
"Because my mum bought me it! Also, y'know when you pick a guitar up to try it out and it just seems to fit right in your hands? The neck just had the right shape to suit me, and the weight of the wood on those early 90s models just made them sing. Later on, my good friend Jimmy Moon the guitar maker put the out of phase switch in for me to get that Greeny sound!"

**4 It's perfect for...**
"The rock tunes in the King King set, as it has that big, badass beefy rock tone to it – especially with the Bare Knuckle Mule pickups I've put in it. I use it for songs like *She Don't Gimme No Lovin'*, which is from our new album, *Exile & Grace*. It sounds great when the chorus kicks in on tunes like *Jealousy*, too!"

**5 It sounds best with...**
"I use it with an Orange Dual Terror amp turned up to around 10 past... it reminds me of being a kid watching Marty McFly try out the huge amp in *Back To The Future*. I'm still a big kid.. It also sounds great when I use the Mad Professor Sweet Honey overdrive pedal and a Jesse Davey Duellist drive pedal!"

**6 You can hear it on...**
"On our records, you can hear the guitar on the likes of *Broken*, *Tear It All Up* and *Long Time Running* on our new record, as well as a host of others from all our albums. It was the natural choice for these songs, as that 'Les Paul tone' just cried out to be used for classic rock tunes – it's a man's guitar!"

**King King's new album, *Exile & Grace*, is out now on Manhaton Records. Their UK tour begins on 17 January 2018 – for more info see www.kingking.co.uk**

© Mike Prior

# KIM CHURCHILL

## A young Australian guitarist who's bringing density and depth to the acoustic scene thanks to some clever technology, and a whole lot of coordination...

With his messy blonde hair, piercing blue eyes and laid-back demeanour, Kim Churchill pretty much ticks every 'Aussie surfer' box – and it's something that the New South Walian 27-year-old can't get away from. "It's not helping with stereotype thing!" He laughs. "But the ocean and surfing has always inspired me. It's a different world every time you paddle out. The water will move in a unique way and the waves will have a different shape. It reminds me so much of life."

Playing guitar has always been a family affair for Churchill – he began playing when his mum got a guitar and started to learn, "She'd come home and give me the same lesson she just had," he recalls. "We loved doing that together." Given that, it's perhaps not surprising that when he started to play out, he did the whole thing himself. As he drove a van around surf towns busking and gigging, he began accompanying his voice and acoustic with harmonica and foot-controlled percussion.

But while he was happy to pay his dues, he had his eye on bigger things. "In my early years at school I remember really identifying myself as 'the kid who played guitar'," he recalls. "I was always really ambitious, too. I wanted to do something major."

As he gained more success in his homeland, Churchill also began expanding what he did. Inspired by Radiohead and Bon Iver as much as Dylan and Nick Drake, he began to include samples and loops into his live shows, and ran various lines off his guitar to add effects to his percussive acoustic style.

"I play with a kick drum and snare drum on my feet," Kim explains of his current set-up. "My guitar has about six lines: acoustic, body percussion, electric, electric DI, SUBLine... I know, I know – it's a bit indulgent. My harmonica runs through a separate line and has distortion, POG and delays. My favourite pedals are currently the Strymon BigSky and TimeLine, and a distortion pedal I have that's called the Dirt Transmitter by EarthQuaker."

It all comes together to create some unique soundscapes that go beyond the cliché of the loop-using solo guitarist – to such an extent that he's had to recruit two extra musicians to back him up to cover the sonic density of his seventh studio album, *Weight Falls*.

"I think there's more acoustic guitar on this album," he cautions. "But there is a lot more going on in the 'beats' department, which possibly leans away from a traditional 'acoustic' sound. I demoed the songs in GarageBand and it allowed me to cut up all my acoustic guitar parts and get really freaky with them. The album is lots of chopped up acoustic guitar, mixed with heavy bass synth and loads and loads of harmonies and floor toms."

With *Weight Falls* charting in the top 10 in his homeland, and a big following in Canada, Kim has turned his attention to the UK, returning to these shores at the end of November for a series of gigs. "A lot of the music I grew up listening to comes from the UK," he enthuses, "And I felt really legit getting to play there myself. Such serious history, y'know?"

**Kim Churchill's UK tour starts on 27 November, for dates and info visit www.kimchurchill.com**

# Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: getting out of the house for a change, unconventional bridges and loud Fenders...

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Clinic Clap

**Dear TGM, first of all I wanted to say as a long-time subscriber thanks for putting out such a brilliant mag every month – I've been buying it for over a decade now and I can safely say it's never been better. But enough of me blowing smoke up your arse, because I have a point of order I want to raise with you! Back in March of this year I attended what was then the Guitar & Bass Presents... Guthrie Govan event down in London, and I had an absolutely fantastic time!**

**I live quite a way from London but I'm a massive Guthrie fan, so I decided it was worth the hassle of getting down to the Big Smoke on a Thursday night... and it was. It was amazing seeing Guthrie in such a small and cool venue... he even answered one of my questions! I came out of the venue afterward feeling really inspired and excited, and I couldn't wait until you put on the next one!**

**And that's rather the nature of my complaint – it's been over six months now and I haven't heard a peep of you organising another event. I was looking forward to getting a regular dose of guitar inspiration (and an excuse to get out of the house for an evening!), so please tell me you have plans to do another one?**

**Russ Phillips**, *via email*

***GM* Thanks for the kind words Russ – stay tuned for some exciting news about our plans for events in 2018, we don't think you'll be disappointed! In the mean time, hopefully a free StroboClip HD tuner will tide you over!**

### WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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### Bridging The Gap

Dear *The Guitar Magazine*, my compliments on your recent Guitar Classics bookazine, *Dream Machines* – I really enjoyed reading it! As I was flicking through page after page of gorgeous vintage guitars, I came across the cover feature about the amazing Gibson Les Paul Goldtop – what an amazing instrument! As I was reading the feature, I couldn't help but notice the replacement bridge that had been fitted to the guitar, which your writer describes as a "mystery unit, possibly a Teisco from 1967" – well I can hopefully solve your mystery! I believe that the bridge used is actually a Guild unit made by Muller in Germany, which Guild started to use in around 1971. I know this because I own two Guilds from the 1970s who sport this exact unit – I believe it was known as an AdjustoMatic in Guild parlance. Greetings from Holland!

**Joost Temme**, via email

***GM* Thanks for the information Joost – when it comes to very old guitars that have been modded and tweaked so much over the years, things can become a bit opaque, so thanks for clearing it all up!**

### Too Hot Rod

First of all congratulations on an excellent magazine – I particularly enjoy your honest and in-depth reviews and Huw Price's amp workshops. On the subject of amps, I wonder if you can offer my poor, tired ears some advice? I've owned a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe for a couple of years now, It's a really great amp for the money, but while I love its lovely big chiming clean sound, it's just too damn loud! I've lost count of the times my bandmates have told me to turn down in practice (when the amp is only on two), and I've fallen out with at least five soundmen this year! Not to mention my poor neighbours. The amp seems to go from inaudible to deafeningly loud within the slightest turn of the volume knob. Don't get me wrong, it's a great-sounding amp, but it's just not working for me at home, in the practice room and at the small pub gigs we play. Can you recommend any alternatives that will give me a similar, big classic Fender-style clean sound with lots of bottom-end and great reverb without breaking the bank?

**Ray Clough**, Stockton-on-Tees

***GM* What you've got there is a common complaint, Ray – the Hot Rod Deluxe is a cracking amp, but it can be hard to tame for small gigs, and certainly in a home environment! If you like your big, high-headroom Fender clean sounds then the obvious place to start is another Fender – the Deluxe Reverb. Fender's '65 Deluxe Reverb is a great amp for the money, or if you want something a bit more fancy, the '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb is a hand-wired version that's reviewed on p98. Alternatively, you could buy an attenuator for your Hot Rod? If you're feeling brave you can even build one yourself! Head to bit.ly/diyattenuator to find out how do it!**

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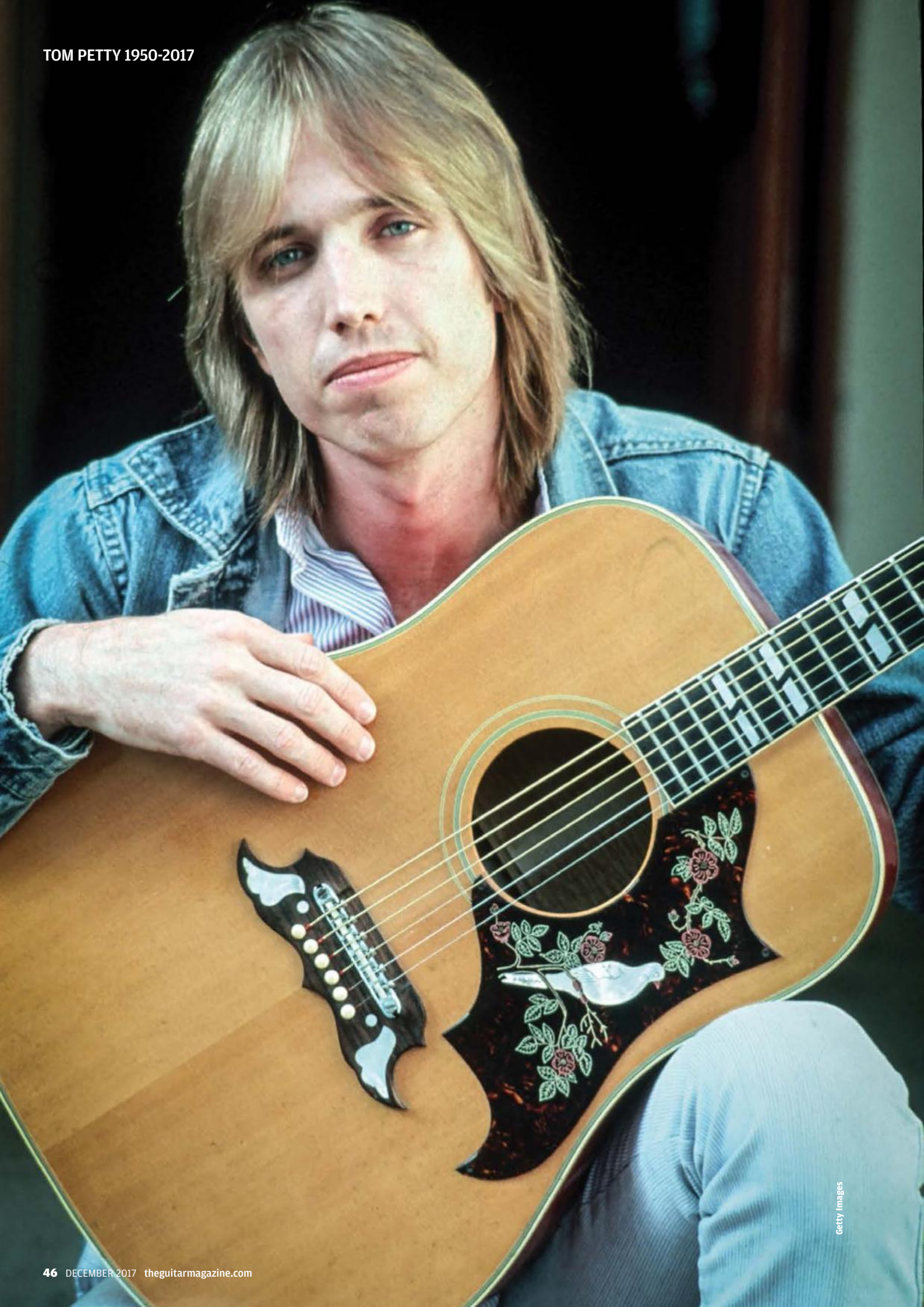


Getty Images

# TOM PETTY

## 1950-2017

You don't have to be an American Guy (or Girl) to feel acute grief at the passing of Tom Petty. But it probably helps. In his home country, Petty wasn't just another multi-million-selling rock star: he was seen as a custodian of 'real' rock 'n' roll. A man who'd appeal to gnarled hippies as well as more wily hipsters. As British-born, USA-raised producer Mark Ronson wrote on Petty's passing, "Growing up in the 1980s in MTV America, Tom Petty might as well have been The Beatles. It was the music you wanted to hear in your car. It was the music you'd hear at a baseball game."

Tom Petty's music didn't often stray from a well-worn path, but it walked its line so assuredly he was near-impossible to disparage. When The Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame inducted Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers in 2002, it praised them as "durable, resourceful, hard-working, likeable and unpretentious." The UK may prefer its rock stars to be more melodramatic, but not middle America. On Wikipedia, Petty's music is classified as Heartland Rock. And there's no greater tribute.

An underachieving schoolkid who was beaten by his father, Petty found solace in music: his tale really is like the classic rock 'n' roll fable. After meeting Elvis Presley at a movie shoot (in 1961, aged 11), he became devoted to music as "a safe place": inspired by The Beatles and The Byrds, he formed his first band aged 14. He later became enamoured with Bob Dylan and the trusty Southern Rock that filled his Florida environs. Befitting what was said of him later, Petty simply worked hard at the art: "When I was 15 or 16, we used to sit in the car and try to write the lyrics down as the [radio] song was playing. We'd assign each person a verse. Sometimes you'd wait an hour for it to come on again so you could finish it off."

*With his cache of classic guitars and seemingly unending twists on simple-chord melodicism, Petty truly was a mainline to a traditional rock 'n' roll*

With friends Mike Campbell (guitar) and Benmont Tench (keyboards), Petty was in Southern rockers Mudcrutch (a small record deal, no hits) before going solo. Petty didn't warm to that, though – "I didn't like working with session musicians," he later admitted – and was soon reunited with his past buddies, who by that time had their own band, The Heartbreakers. Solution? Join forces. Despite The Heartbreakers' nominal add-on, it was always insisted they and Petty were one, a whole unit. TPATH actually built a rep quicker in the UK and strangely, looking back, they were seen as some sort of 'new wave' band. *American Girl* (1976) tickled the charts – though not in the USA, where it would only become an FM radio staple years later – but after third album, *Damn The Torpedoes* (1979), Petty's stock grew at speed. *Don't Do Me Like That* – a song Petty originally wanted to give to the J Geils Band – and *Refugee* were hits and made them 'pop stars', albeit weird ones. "That was the record where life was never going to be the same again," Petty later noted.

And life never was the same. The 80s saw Petty and the Heartbreakers settle into a groove of Gold and Platinum albums. Petty hung with Dylan, wrote songs for Stevie Nicks (*Stop Draggin' My Heart Around*), and he had almost-unrivalled good press. That said, critics didn't find much to like in some of Eurythmic Dave Stewart's overtly 80s production (drum machines, synths) on 1985's *Southern Accents*, but the public lapped it up: the *Alice In Wonderland*-inspired video for *Don't Come Around Here No More* was one of many MTV-snaring visuals that compensated for Petty's own "non image".

Around this time, Petty hopped on the Traveling Wilburys bus for another smash – although in exalted company and the last to join, the presence of 'Charlie T Wilbury, Jr' no doubt helped the oldsters' supergroup (including Dylan, Roy Orbison and George Harrison) capture a pop audience. He continued collaborating with fellow Wilbury Jeff Lynne on his debut solo album of 1991, *Full Moon Fever*: casual observers might find it hard to pinpoint what's different from a Heartbreakers album and, in truth, there isn't much – only drummer Stan Lynch is notably absent. But in *Free Falling*, *I Won't Back Down*, and *Running Down A Dream*, Petty continued to deliver stately, solid rockers that have remained earworms ever since. The Heartbreakers' return for *Into The Great Wide Open* was more of the same. As producer Jimmy Iovine told VH1 in the 90s, "[Tom's] one of the most consistent songwriters I've ever laid eyes on." And so Petty continued, with mere sonic shading the difference on ever-reliable output: the solo *Wildflowers* (1994) was more folk-rootsy, while his final recorded hurrah of 2014, *Hypnotic Eye*, revisited the more raucous garage rock of the Heartbreakers' youth.

Petty himself was not usually responsible for the virtuoso flourishes of his records. He had Mike Campbell, Benmont Tench, Stan Lynch and later Steve Ferrone (both drums) for that: and to musos, these 'sidemen' were often the real stars. He also had superb producers, such as Iovine, Rick Rubin and Stewart and Lynne. But Petty had the hardest currency of any: the songs. They were both well-crafted, knowing and often acerbic: even that breakthrough hit, *Refugee*, was a grumble about record company contracts just two albums in.

But with his cache of classic guitars and seemingly unending twists on simple-chord melodicism, Petty truly was a mainline to a traditional rock 'n' roll that's fast disappearing. Bruce Springsteen lamenting the passing of a fellow writer who felt like "a long lost brother" says it all.

Nevertheless, it's odd that Petty had a 'rebel' reputation, and in its own tribute the always-supportive *Rolling Stone* called Petty "an iconoclast". That may be true of his business dealings – he was a thorn in the side of many label and promoter – but Petty's music is traditional to the core, and that will be his legacy. For the millions of followers who've fumbled with a capo to learn *Free Falling* or riffed the familiar arpeggios of *Into The Great Wide Open*, that effortless song-savvy is to be cherished.

# New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

© Getty Images

## Beck
## COLORS

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

Beck has spent his last few albums shedding his reputation for scattergun genre-hopping, and so it's not surprising that *Colors* sees him make a left turn – but perhaps not the one most of us were expecting. Beck has flirted with mainstream pop success in his career, but *Colors* is without doubt his most deliberate and comprehensive attempt at capturing the airwaves, ably assisted by his one-time touring sideman turned Grammy-winning producer, Greg Kurstin, whose credits include Adele's *25*, Kylie Minogue's *X* and scores of others.

Since debut single *MTV Makes Me Want To Smoke Crack*, Beck's music has often been fed through the sardonic prism of his worldview, but here the vibe is almost relentlessly breezy. *Seventh Heaven* is a case in point, with its pounding electronic beats, skyscraping synths and a clever looped crystalline guitar riff creating such a good time vibe it practically demands to be played with sunglasses on and the windows down. It's similarly sunny on *No Distractions*, where Beck breaks out his chorus pedal for some reggae-tinged stabs that wouldn't sound out of place coming from Andy Summers' amplifier in 1979.

Beck has been gestating this album for the better part of three years, and so it's no surprise to see *Dreams* – a single released all the way back in 2015 that clearly signposted the direction of this album – given a remix for *Colors*. The towering funk guitar part that made it a hit on both sides of the Atlantic is just as infectious here as its ever been.

Beck's tendency to move through genres is back with a bang, bringing upbeat energy to everything from *Wow*'s laid-back SoCal hip-hop to the power-pop thrust of *I'm So Free*. The latter really grips your attention, and from the chugging flanger-tinged opening chords to the scuzzy distorted singalong chorus, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were listening to an unearthed mid-period Weezer gem.

If there's a drawback to all this, however, it's that too often *Colors* feels like Beck's borrowing someone else's hat to groove across the dance floor – there's a purity to the fun he's having, but it all feels a bit disposable. Nobody can be an eye-rolling cynic forever of course, and Beck is clearly enjoying himself throughout, but it leaves *Colours* lacking some of the off-kilter creativity that defined his best work. **JG**

**8/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Bruno Mars, The Flaming Lips, Weezer*

## Weezer
**PACIFIC DAYDREAM**

Rivers Cuomo's restless creativity has been both a blessing and a curse for Weezer. The power-pop of their near-perfect debut gave way to the angsty genius of *Pinkerton*, but has also led to some missteps along the way. After two albums of classic fan-pleasing Weezer, *Pacific Daydream* sees Cuomo in an experimental mood once again, and is a more polarising album as a result. Opener *Mexican Fender* sees Rivers in anthemic form – hitting big fizzy powerchords over typically eccentric lyrics, with a singalong chorus and the requisite oohs. But things get a bit more unusual after that – the slapback stabs and punchy bassline of *Beach Boys* has an almost Auerbachian flavour, while the dreamy acoustic and layered harmonies of *QB Blitz* worships nakedly at the Brian Wilson altar. The second half sees Rivers and Brian Bell indulge their acoustic impulses, but *Sweet Mary* and *La Mancha Screwjob* veer a bit too much into saccharine territory. *Pacific Daydream* is a little throwaway at times, but it's still an interesting take on the Weezer formula. **GJ**

**7/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *OK Go, Jimmy Eat World*

## St Vincent
**MASSEDUCTION**

Annie Clark has always been unafraid to challenge convention, and so it's no surprise that *Masseduction* feels like a significant change in direction compared to the scuzzy art-rock of the Grammy-winning *St Vincent*. This is a more personal, raw album with a more intimate vibe. It also firmly embraces her pop side, and rejects the 'guitar hero' tag – relying on mostly electronic instruments and beats to craft her sound. Indeed, we have to wait until second track, *Pills* to see her break out her angular, noisy, metallic guitar in any major way. Solos might be few and far between, then, but she hasn't rejected her instrument – she's simply chosen to use it in more interesting ways. The Prince-y title track is a case in point, with the heavily saturated guitar fed through a harmoniser and used to ice-pick effect when it finally roars into view. The challenge of making guitar relevant in a modern pop landscape that seems disinterested in real instruments has outfoxed many, but here Clark demonstrates again why she's one of the most unique and creative guitar players around. **JG**

**8/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Prince, Lady Gaga, HAIM*

## Wolf Alice
**VISIONS OF A LIFE**

Following their Mercury Prize-nominated debut, Wolf Alice return with *Visions Of A Life* – a darker beast with more refined characteristics than their previous foray into dreamy, synth-laden rock. Frontwoman Ellie Rowsell is omnipresent throughout, playing the role of both the student at the back of the school bus lobbing pencils at the small kids (*Yuk Foo*), while simultaneously sitting at the front, hunched over her journal (*Don't Delete The Kisses*). Joff Oddie has become somewhat of a benchmark for British guitarists as of late – as though Thurston Moore was playing in a Britpop band. His approach sits behind Ellie's vocals perfectly, both direct and angular – *Yuk Foo*, *Formidable Cool* and the title track stand out. Justin Meldal-Johnsen (Beck, NIN, Paramore, M83) adds confidence through his production, with his Beck-esque groove influence evident on *Beautifully Unconventional*. The title track shows their intended direction, though, with eight minutes of growth into a mammoth ending. Second album syndrome? No chance. **SR**

**9/10**

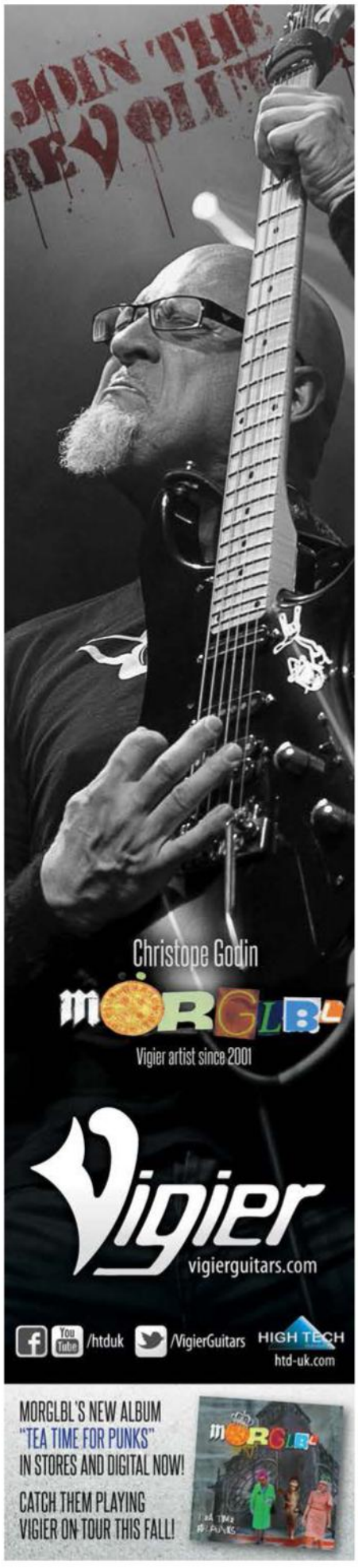
**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *The Joy Formidable, Blur*

## Rock Candy Funk Party
**THE GROOVE³**

Joe Bonamassa's good time jam band return with a third album, and the brief is to "expect the unexpected". That's certainly the case with the funky sleazy blues of *Drunk On Bourbon On Bourbon St*, which sees JoBo roll off the tone and indulge in a filthy lo-fi wander that builds to a crescendo of jazz blues interplay with Renato Neto's silky smooth Rhodes. As you'd expect from a jam band, Rock Candy Funk Party's seasoned sessioneers don't stay tied to one genre for long, and over the course of the album's 14 tracks the group wander their way through a smorgasbord of funk-tinged musical flavours. There's even a diversion into uptempo jazz on the album closer, *Ping Pong*, where Joe shows that he can blaze up and down a fretboard like he's in a smoky New York club. The standout, *Don't Even Try It*, sees Vintage Trouble's Ty Taylor bringing a Bruno Mars strut to a foot-tapping number that drips with 80s Prince vibes. Joe is clearly having fun here, and it shows in his varied playing throughout. **GJ**

**7/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Joe Bonamassa, Prince, Eric Gales*



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# The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

Session guitar players are some of the most versatile musicians on the planet. On any given day they could be asked to play a variety of different instruments in radically different styles, with no room for error and a near-telepathic understanding of what the producer or artist wants to take their track to the next level. For over half a century, session players have been the hidden heroes of pop music – adding hooks and lines that helped sell millions of copies, sometimes without so much as a name in the liner notes to credit their contribution.

Very few of us have the talent, creativity and temprament to be session guitarists, but we can all learn a lot from the wisdom they possess. So, over the next 30 pages, you'll find the great and the good of the studio world sharing their experiences and knowledge – from Wrecking Crew legends who played on some of the biggest hits of all time, to modern studio aces who are demanded by some of the hottest acts in pop, rock and country music.

We hope you learn something that makes you look at the way you play differently, but at the very least, it tells a fascinating and little-known tale of some of the most important musicians who ever lived. The red light is on, so let's hit it...

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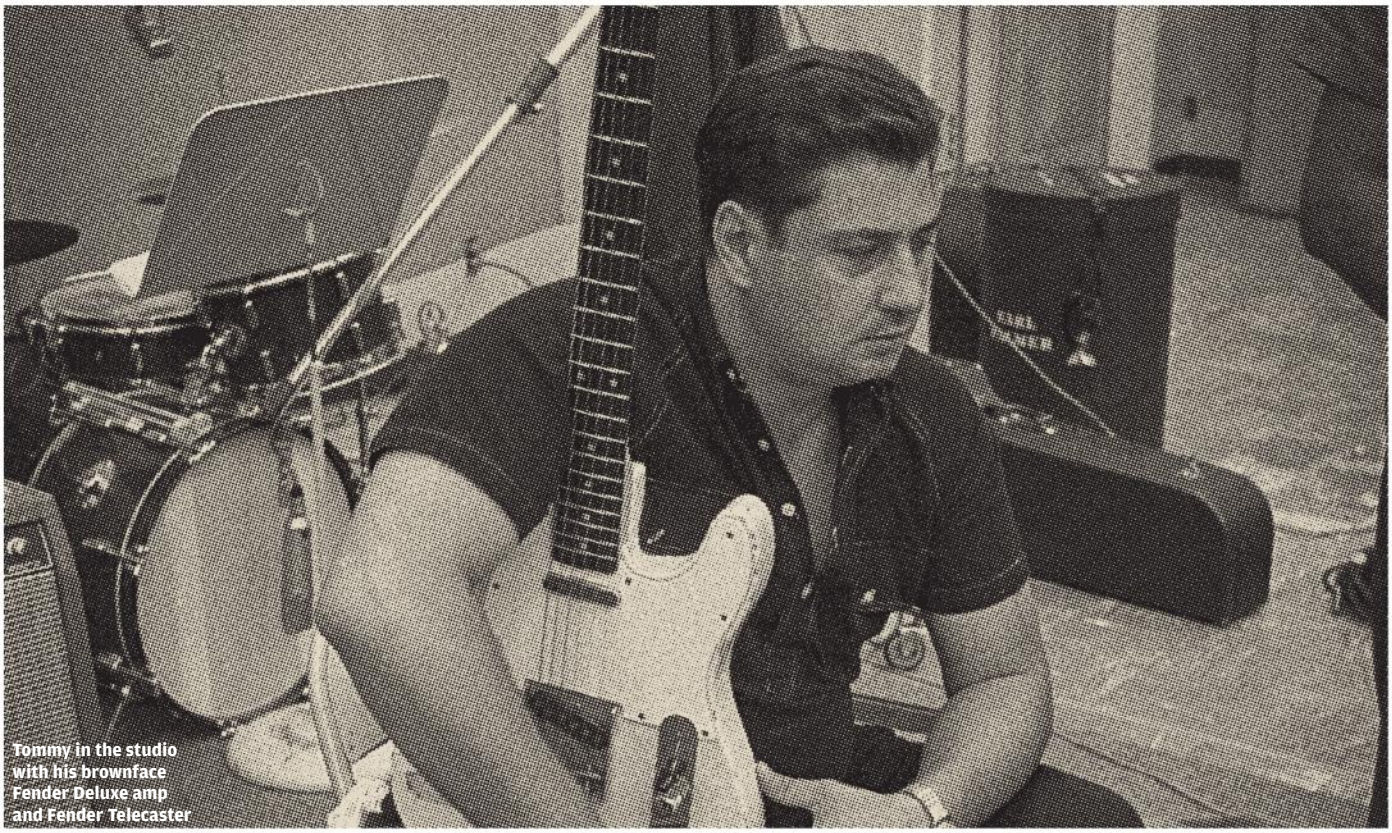
Tommy Tedesco (left) with legendary Wrecking Crew drummer Hal Blaine



Tommy in the studio with his brownface Fender Deluxe amp and Fender Telecaster

The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

# RECORDING KING

It's been 20 years since the world lost the most recorded guitar player in history, Tommy Tedesco. **BOB HEWITT** looks back at his remarkable contribution to pop music and sits down with the Wrecking Crew guitarist's filmmaker son, Denny, to discover what Tommy was like in and out of the studio...

Pick a hit from pop's 1960s golden era, and the chances are Tommy Tedesco and his Wrecking Crew compadres were all over it. The legendary Los Angeles session group came to the fore in a time when the shirt and tie-clad session establishment saw rock 'n' roll as a passing fad. Dressed in t-shirts and Levis, The Wrecking Crew were a group of young, talented and dedicated musicians who embraced the new movement, and redefined the session scene in LA for the decade.

Drummer Hal Blaine claimed the Wrecking Crew name was invented as a disparaging term by the older session guys, who saw them as upstarts 'wrecking' the scene (though bassist/guitarist Carol Kaye disputes this, see p60) – but it didn't hurt them one bit. They could record an album a day for six weeks on the trot – often working around the clock in one of LA's famous studios, answering calls at all hours of the day and night.

After the Musicians Union insisted that session players get sleeve note recognition instead of labouring anonymously behind the scenes, The Crew clocked up six Record Of The Year Grammy awards in succession in the mid-60s and early 70s. Jimmy Webb called them 'studio hit men' (though there was of course one woman in the crew, bassist and guitarist Kaye) – and while the Tommy Tedesco and his fellow guitarists – Bill Pitman, Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Dennis Budimir, Glen Campbell and James Burton – might not be as famous as the hits they played on, they had a huge role in shaping a golden age of popular music. Behind the The Beach Boys, Sam Cooke, The Ventures, The Monkees, Sonny & Cher, Frank and Nancy Sinatra, The Mamas and & Papas, The Ronettes, and of course Elvis; there was The Crew.

The Righteous Brothers' *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* is the most played record of all time, but it's Tommy Tedesco and The Wrecking Crew laying down the vibe. Multi-instrumentalist Tedesco was extraordinarily prolific, lending his famous signature-strewn Tele to everything from the *Batman* theme to Frank Zappa's *Lumpy Gravy* debut to backing up Elvis on the *'68 Comeback Special* – as

Tommy's famous 'Stradivarius' Tele was signed by a wealth of fellow session pros that he worked with

On closer inspectition you can make out the signatures of various players, including James Burton and Wrecking Crew keyboardist Don Randi

After years of speculation we can reveal that Tommy's Tele dates from August 1960

The headstock of Tommy's 1960 Tele with added string tree

# THE HIT MAKER

**The secrets of Tommy's legendary 'Stradivarius' Fender Telecaster**

Tommy's Fender Telecaster is the most recorded guitar of all time. Tommy himself had painted dollar signs and 'Tedesco's Stradivarius' onto the body. Eventually, it became signature-strewn, as fellow studio musicians and recording artists added autographs, too. Tommy would also stub out his burning cigarettes on his Telecaster – especially if a producer was annoying him!

During a drunken session for *The Wichita Train Whistle Sings* album in 1967, The Monkees' Mike Nesmith asked James Burton and Tommy Tedesco to, "Freak out and play a wild solo outro". Burton did just that, but when it came to Tommy's turn, he cranked his amp, hit a chord, and launched the guitar across the studio – "just to hear the sound of breaking strings and wood" as it hit the floor.

The resulting smashing sound and feedback was left on the track, and Tommy asked everyone to sign what was left of the guitar – it was repaired but swiftly retired.

Check out the images above to get an exclusive up-close look at this much-debated instrument, including proof for the first time that the neck dates from August 1960.

well as recording his own music and writing several books himself as well.

## Niagara Calls

Born in Niagara Falls, New York in 1930, a young Tommy Tedesco honed his guitar skills under the tuition of John Morrell and Pete Cicero, and would put his skills to use playing local gigs to subsidise his day job at a chemical plant.

A chance encounter with Ralph Marterie's big band at a university dance changed everything, however. Tommy had griped about going as he had a gig booked that evening, but his wife had bought a new dress and she wasn't going to waste it. At the dance, Tommy got word that Marterie's guitar player was leaving the band and he should audition for the seat. He did, and the next day quit his job at the plant to head out on the road.

Tommy was living his dream – playing across the country with Marterie, with a first issue Les Paul Goldtop in his hands (there's also footage from 1953 that shows him with what appears to be a black or brown Les Paul with P-90s), even making it to LA and the Hoagy Carmichael Show. But it wasn't to last – when the band reached Dallas, Marterie found a singer who would also play guitar, and promptly sacked Tedesco and his lead singer to save some cash.

Despondent, the 23-year-old Tommy headed back to Niagara Falls, but he wasn't defeated – he'd seen that guitarists could make a good living in Los Angeles, so packed him and his wife, Carmeline, off to the Golden State. Once they arrived, Tommy took a job at Lockheed – which he later claimed was the best he ever had... as he hated it so much it drove him to practise 10 hours a day!

## Rock Calling

Tedesco became a feature on the LA club scene, culminating in a meeting with fellow guitarist Bob Bain – who asked Tommy if he would sub for him on the popular *Ozzie And Harriet Show*. Playing with Ricky Nelson, this is where Tommy got his feel for rock 'n' roll, and where he saw the fashion for West Coast jazz was changing to surf-orientated pop music and folk rock – which would eventually lead to 'The California Sound'.

From the mid-50s through to the 1970s, Tedesco was at the top of his game. Being a versatile guitarist, a great reader, timely, and easy to get along with, meant he was

'first call' for in all the major studios. He polished and enhanced his chops playing jazz, classical, rhythm and blues, soul, rock – even TV jingles and world music. He also became proficient on a variety of instruments – ranging from his 'Stradivarius' Telecaster to obscure ethnic acoustic rarities. Tommy also loved his nylon-string classical guitar – which, unusually, he played with a plectrum.

Whether he was laying down parts on Sinatra's *Strangers In The Night* or Richard Harris's *MacArthur Park*, or TV show themes for the likes of *Kojak*, *Starsky & Hutch* and *M*A*S*H*, Tommy was equally at home. His reliability and versatility saw him work with composers and producers including Phil Spector, Brian Wilson, John Williams and Henry Mancini.

As the decades rolled on, The Wrecking Crew were less in demand for pop dates, and Tommy's work shifted to film and TV music. You can hear his exquisite playing on *The Godfather*, *Jaws* and *The Deer Hunter* among countless others.

## Dry Signal

Tommy was a natural joker with a dry wit – he would amuse his colleagues and demonstrate his incredible reading skills by turning a score sheet upside down and playing it backwards. One famous tale involves the recording of the famous theme for *Hawaii Five-0* by The Ventures. The surf legends were a great live band but they were struggling in the studio, and so producer Joe Saraceno sent out a call to get Tedesco into Liberty Studios.

Joe told Tommy he'd send over a messenger with the music, but Tedesco responded, "Don't do that, I can play that stuff in my sleep." The messenger arrived at his door regardless, and a put out Tommy quickly scans the music, tears it to pieces and tells the messenger to take it back to Saraceno. A little while later, Tommy turns up at the studio, and without saying a word, plugs in his Tele, puts the guitar behind his head and plays the part note perfect, first time. He then turns to the producer and asks, "Is that okay, Joe?"

Jokes aside, Tedesco was renowned for his ability to interpret an arrangement – to improve the musical feel and put his own indelible 'sound stamp' on the song. He would say that notes on paper are one thing – but to take those charts and add your own creativity is another.

> "Tommy was the godfather of all studio players – we all revered him. He was a master and one of the funniest cats ever!"

It certainly helped that he could play any style required to fit the bill. He often had 20 different stringed instruments – from a collection of over 100 – at his disposal. He would say yes to virtually any request – Coral electric sitar, Danelectro six-string bass, mandolin, banjo, bouzouki, oud... the list was almost endless.

## In Requiem

In 1975, Tommy wrote and recorded *Requiem For A Studio Guitar Player* – reflecting on a golden era that seemed to have passed so quickly. He always took three things to the popular seminars he ran on both sides of the Atlantic – his guitar, his knowledge and his unique humour. In later years, Tedesco especially loved playing his Greg Brandt and Ramírez classical guitars. However, in 1992 he suffered a stroke – a cruel and disabling attack for anyone, but devastating for a guitarist. He persevered – and carried on with his seminars, but sold many of his instruments.

Tedesco's last movie score after his stroke was *Schindler's List* for legendary film composer John Williams. Three years later, Tommy was diagnosed with lung cancer – and sadly he passed away in 1997 at the age of 67.

In many ways, Tommy Tedesco paved the way for the session guitarists that have followed after him. Some remained anonymous 'studio hounds' – others found worldwide fame, such as Toto guitarist Steve Lukather. *The Guitar Magazine* spoke to Steve in Los Angeles – and he had this to say about the legacy of Tommy Tedesco, "Tommy was the godfather of all studio players – we all revered him," he explains of the guitarist. "He was a master – a one of a kind legend – and one of the funniest cats ever! I got to call him a friend – they just don't make this kind of human anymore. I was deeply honoured to spend time with him and enjoy his stories – and his kindness and losing bets to him! [laughs] I miss him – we all do."

Tommy Tedesco and Barney Kessel working together in the studio

# TEDESCO ON TEDESCO

Denny Tedesco has ensured his father's legacy will live on, by directing and producing the acclaimed film, *The Wrecking Crew*. Throughout the movie, you can feel the love and admiration Denny has for his dad – but it's also an important historical record, documenting a key time in modern music history – as well as telling the story of the real musicians behind the recordings. In an exclusive interview for *The Guitar Magazine*, Denny tells Bob Hewitt about life with a guitar legend...

### What was it like growing up in the Tedesco household?

"As a kid, I didn't know we were living with an 'artiste' – he's still your father. And he was a hard-working dad – but instead of the hammer, saw or drill; his tools were a Telecaster, the acoustic, a Fender amp – and maybe a mandolin or banjo.

"I didn't know any different, because I never saw my dad working at his craft. It was only in the 70s when I realised he was 'different' – when someone would say, 'Hey – I saw your dad's name on The Partridge Family album'. But even then I didn't think about it that much".

### When did that awareness kick in?

"Probably in high school when I was starting to listen for myself. But then when his jazz album came out and he was getting played on radio, I was like, 'Oh – that's Tommy Tedesco... my dad'. I would call up the radio stations pretending to be someone else, and request my dad's album tracks!"

### Tell us about his guitars...

"In the early days he was using Gibson and Epiphone. But guitars were tools to him – and when he got into movie themes, he started collecting more of them. The rule of thumb was 'If it's funky looking and under $100, I'm grabbing it'. He would pack all these instruments into the trunk of his car, and off he'd go to work. They might stay in the trunk all through the heat of the day – and the cool of the night when he got home"!

### What about maintaining them?

"Dad wouldn't change a string unless one snapped. Wrecking Crew bass player Joe Osborn had the same strings on for 18 years. When someone asked Joe why he didn't change the strings, his answer was 'I didn't know I had to'!"

> "He was a hard-working dad – but instead of the hammer, saw or drill; his tools were a Telecaster, the acoustic, a Fender amp"

### Didn't Tommy play some obscure lute type instruments too?

"Dad had eclectic taste and experience – which meant he was proficient on any number of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean stringed instruments. If the part called for it, he could fill it – be it electric sitar or balalaika. He always tuned them the same as guitar –

The trunk of Tommy's car loaded up with his Fender amp and a selection of instruments ready for the studio

and he learned just enough licks to pretend to be an expert. His joke would be, if he could tune a shovel like a guitar – he would!"

"The Union scale paid 100 per cent for the first instrument, 50 per cent for the second, 25 per cent for the third – and so on. So, the more you played – the more you got paid.

"Something like the TV series *Love Boat* was 'gravy day' for my dad – because it's set in the Mediterranean. So you're going to Italy, Spain, Greece or wherever – and he's playing all these different instruments and styles to suit the scenes."

**He must have owned quite a collection?**

"By now, dad has stopped filling the trunk of the car – and the studios are providing cartage. So he's now taking two or three big cases of stringed instruments to a session. One day, a string player who doesn't get any 'doubles'; sarcastically shouts to him, 'Hey – do you even know the name of half of those instruments?' Ever the joker, he holds a couple up and says, 'Sure I do – this one's called 100 per cent, this one's 50 per cent, and this one's 25 per cent…'

"Dad owned close to 100 instruments, but right now we have about 50 at home – because he sold a lot after his stroke. Whatever he bought, he would put his name in the union book as a player of that instrument – and he just needed to know enough to play it.

"There were instruments he didn't care to play too much – like the oud. If the producer would say 'Hey Tommy – you got your oud?' He'd say 'sure' and hold it up. But when it came time to play the part, he'd take his acoustic or classical and de-tune it really loose so he could make it sound like an oud!"

**What was Tommy's favourite instrument to play?**

"The classical guitar for sure. There's warmth to the classical guitar… that Spanish sound? He made it his own. When it came to The Beach Boys, dad mostly played his Telecaster. That Telecaster… he had fun with it – and made a career with it. He didn't listen to the finished product much – because like a lot of the other guys in studios, it wasn't their kind of music. Plus he was crazy busy going from one session to the next. What he did like about The Beach Boys, were the harmonies – that kind of Hi-Lo's and Four Freshmen style that dad grew up with."

**Who were your dad's favourite artists to record for?**

"Frank Sinatra for sure – because for someone from an Italian family to say you're playing for Sinatra? That's huge. He loved playing for Elvis – and the show that went with it – including the money and the food! Also my dad got to play his acoustic stuff for Elvis – in the movies, alongside James Burton. But he was most proud of the nylon-string guitar that he played on *Memories* for the *'68 Comeback Special*."

Tommy with his Martin acoustic joking with Wrecking Crew keyboardist, Don Randi

**What did your father bring to music for you?**

"When I hear his music, I know it's him – and that's really cool. My mom passed away last January, and at her funeral I pulled the clips from the themes he worked on. James Horner's *Field Of Dreams*, John Williams' *The River*, Bill Conti's *Gloria* – and these are truly Tommy Tedesco, because you can hear his nuances. Dad didn't just play notes – he would play from here to here [points to either end of a fretboard] but he would make music from [his heart].

"Dad may not have been a true classical guitarist – but he could play classical style even though he used a plectrum! Producers would say, 'Hey Tommy – can you play it fingerstyle?' Dad would say 'sure' – and warm up playing with his fingers. Then as soon as it was time for a take, he'd go back to using a plec' – and the producer would say, 'Yeah that's great, so much better Tommy!'"

**Finally Denny, what do you think that Tommy would most like to be remembered for?**

"I think the kindness – and in terms of music, the movie stuff for sure. Anyone of the eight guitarists in the studio could sit in the *Batman* or *Green Acres* seat and do what he was doing. But when James Horner or John Williams calls up and says, 'I have a movie in two months – keep the first week of September free, Tommy', they're calling for him – not just any classical guitar player. It was for dad's interpretation and his 'colouring' – and also what he sometimes left out, that was important.

"Dad would explain during his seminars, 'You've got to stand out. You play a G chord, I play a G chord… no one is going to hire you for your G chord'. Dad said that he 'played for smiles' in the studio – because if the composer or producer isn't smiling – you're dead".

"One of the greatest tributes came from John Williams who said, 'When I write a piece of music, you hope that your orchestra is going to give you 75 to 80 per cent of what's there. But with guys like Tommy Tedesco, he's giving you more than that – he's giving you 110 per cent, because you're getting something you don't expect – his own spin on it.'"

**For more information about Tommy Tedesco's recorded works, books for guitar players, tutorial videos, and more details of Denny's *The Wrecking Crew* movie, visit www.wreckingcrewfilm.com**

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Carol switched from an Epiphone Emperor to an early Jazzmaster for electric sessions

The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

# SPECIAL KAYE

Carol Kaye is one of the greatest session players of all time. From The Beach Boys and Simon & Garfunkel to Frank Zappa and Phil Spector, the one-time Wrecking Crew member has contributed bass and guitar to an estimated 10,000 recording sessions. She spoke to **DAVID GALLANT** to explode some myths and give an insider's view of some of the most seminal sessions of all time...

The corner of the Californian desert in which Carol Kaye resides is nothing if not a tranquil place – out here away from everyone, the peace is almost palpable, broken only by the intermittent chatter of the cicadas. It's a far cry from Downtown LA and the city hubbub where Kaye was once one of the busiest and most sought after musicians on the West Coast session scene. From the late 1950s to the late 60s she never seemed to be out of the studio, busy laying down tracks that would go on to help define the course of popular music.

Born in the middle of the Depression in Everett, Washington, Kaye's parents were both professional musicians. Her father played the trombone in a band and her mother taught piano at the primary school. "They didn't have a good marriage," says Kaye candidly. "I was the last of three girls and my dad really wanted a boy. When my mom got mad with my dad, she used to play Chopin and Ragtime. Great music on the piano. I got a whole dose of that." When Pearl Harbour happened, Kaye remembers her dad packing the family into the car and driving them south to California. "We moved into a housing project close by to where they built ships and aircraft and I remember that we were on welfare for a while. When I was nine I was scrubbing floors, doing everything I could to put food on the table."

Then, when she was 13, a 'steel guitar' salesman came by the project and as Kaye remembers... "My dad had some money that he'd brought with him when we came to California and he bought one of these guitars." Kaye began having lessons and immediately showed an extraordinary natural talent, so much so that within a year she was working with her teacher and starting to play jazz gigs. "The first jazz gig I did was in a small club, as part of a trio. I worked in a lot of small jazz combos."

## Studio Steps

By the mid-50s, Kaye had given birth to a baby, got married and was on the road with the big bands. "Then I heard bebop jazz on the radio and I thought, 'That's what I want to play' – so I got into it," she explains. "I was working a day

© Getty Images

Carol Kaye laying down tracks with fellow Wrecking Crew legend, Tommy Tedesco

job as a typist and playing gigs at night with some of the finest bebop jazz players in town, playing gigs all over LA. There were dozens of jazz clubs in the LA area. Then one by one the rock 'n' roll took them over, so they didn't hire jazz anymore. Some of the jazz musicians moved to New York City, some of them dropped dead from drugs and then some of us went into studio work 'cause the money was so good.

"We were raising our kids and it was good, respectable work – better than playing in some dive somewhere. They liked the way I played and I didn't smoke cigarettes, I didn't drink and I didn't do drugs. I was super clean! So I was a good cat. And for the rock 'n' roll they needed guitar players – so there I was!"

"In Blackwells jazz club in 1957, there was a producer there and he said 'Can I use you for a recording session? The guitar player's dropped out.'" The session in question was with Sam Cooke. "At the time I didn't know who Sam Cooke was at all. And it turned out that all the musicians on the session were jazz players, so I felt very comfortable in their company. I remember the session went overtime, but I made more money in three and a half hours of studio work than I did the whole week long as a technical typist and playing bebop at night with the guys. And I thought, if I can do studio work then I don't have to work daytimes anymore."

## Session 'Master

Kaye remembers that on the Sam Cooke session she played her Epiphone Emperor. "I'd had a pickup put on it for the jazz gigs to give me a nice full sound. But most of the time, like on the Sam Cooke session, I used the Epiphone as an acoustic guitar, 'cause by putting the mic to one of the f-holes, you got a great acoustic sound."

For the majority of her electric sessions, however, she needed an electric instrument. "I bought one of the first Fender Jazzmasters," she recalls. "Because it's got the right rock 'n' roll sound, and I had a very special hot pickup put on it – for that sharp sound" The Telecaster was the studio guitar of choice of the day, but she was never a fan. "I never liked the Tele. They were dumb guitars. The neck of the Jazzmaster and the feel of that body were great and I could play for hours on it."

Session players need to have a variety of guitars at their disposal, and it was no different in the golden era. "After buying the Jazzmaster, I bought a Gibson 12-string acoustic guitar," she recalls. "Then about a year or two later, I had the idea of putting a pickup on it. So I put the pickup on it and everybody loved the little lines that I would do. On some of the Sonny & Cher dates that I did I'm playing an electric 12-string – but by that time, I'd got real hip and I had a six-string electric Guild that I'd had made into a 12-string by Nils Holland."

## Bass Hunter

At this time, Kaye was also being hired by the studios to play the 'Dano' – the Danelectro six-

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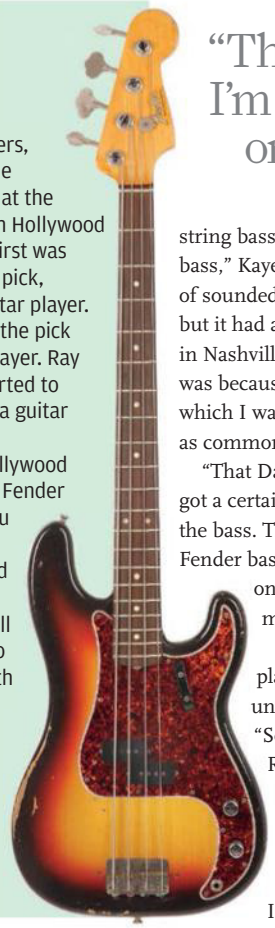
Carol (right) was the first call guitarist and later bassist for studio maverick Phil Spector (left)

## PICKING AND CHOOSING



Unlike many modern bass players, Kaye always used a pick, but she recalls that was the done thing at the time. "Every bass player back in Hollywood used a pick," she insists. "The first was René Hall and he played with a pick, because he was originally a guitar player. Arthur Wright also played with the pick because he was also a guitar player. Ray Pohlman was the third who started to play with the pick – he too was a guitar player. And I'm the fourth.

"Most of the recordings in Hollywood were done with the pick on the Fender bass with flatwound strings. You never used round-wound strings, 'cause they didn't sound good. They didn't record well and they chewed up the pick. All the producers knew they had to use a Fender Precision Bass with a pick on flatwounds. That was the only equipment that they would accept. Now let me tell you somethin', the Fender [P-]Bass back in the 60s was never a great instrument. It was a good instrument, as it got the right sound."

> "They put the bass in my lap and I thought, 'If I'm really good on this, all I have to do is carry one instrument, not four or five guitars...'"

string bass guitar. "Now the 'Dano' was never a bass," Kaye explains. "It was a guitar that kind of sounded like a bass. It was in that range, but it had a clicky sound. Some of the people in Nashville called it 'The Clique-clack'. This was because the group of session musicians, of which I was one, was called 'The Clique' and not as commonly thought, 'The Wrecking Crew'.

"That Dano was tuned down one octave and it got a certain sound, but it never took the place of the bass. The bass part was covered by either the Fender bass or the string bass. I would add notes on the Dano that sounded real good – more notes than the bass was playing."

Kaye did eventually move to playing conventional bass, too – but under serendipitous circumstances. "Somebody didn't show up on a Capitol Records record date in '63 on bass," Kaye recalls. "So knowing that I played the Dano, they asked me. I never asked to play the Fender bass!

"So they put it in my lap and I thought, 'Hey, this is fun!'. And I realised that I could invent my lines and I didn't have to play that dumb stuff anymore. I thought, 'If I'm really good on this, all I have to do is carry one instrument, not four or five guitars...', and within five to six months, I became the first call on the Fender bass."

Even in this day and age, female musicians have a disproportionately hard time getting the respect they deserve, but Kaye describes the 60s LA session scene as surprisingly egalitarian. "There was a lot of respect," she affirms. "All you had to do was play. You know, I knew I was a real player. Most of the people that recorded rock 'n' roll were jazz musicians. Rock 'n' roll groups back in the 1960s could not play. There were hundreds of studio musicians working day and night then. We were the ones who reinvented lines every night to make a hit record."

### The Wall

Kaye was an integral part of Phil Spector's legendary 'Wall Of Sound'. "It must have been around 1961 that Phil and I met on a jazz gig," she remembers. "He walked up to me and said

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Kaye used a variety of instruments during sessions, including this Epiphone archtop in 1966

"Brian Wilson's were the only dates that I didn't have to create a line for. For everyone else, I invented the bass lines"

he liked the way I played. And from then on, I played on most of Phil's things in the 60s. First it was guitar and then later on bass.

"The Wall Of Sound? Let me tell you somethin' – the echo chamber that Dave Gold built at Gold Star Studios ran to the women's restroom, because it had a high ceiling. And when Phil would be playing back and I needed to use the restroom, he'd holla, 'Don't flush that toilet'. Because he used the echo, even for the playback!

"But on *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*, we couldn't even hear ourselves. It was terrible. The great drummer Earl Palmer was on that date and Ray Pohlman was playing bass, and they couldn't quite get the groove together due to the echo. Now I'm just strummin' on the Epiphone – 'cos Phil loved that guitar, it was his favourite sound. And then I play the line with the bass strings on the middle part of the guitar – I'm bearing down on the guitar real hard and leaning into the mic. Phil heard that and he put a slight reverb on it, so it started to help with the groove – and that pulled it together. You'd do anything you could on a record date to make the record a hit, you're not trying to be a star – that's your job."

## Hitting The Beach

As if that wasn't enough, Kaye was a key part of many Beach Boys recordings, using her Jazzmaster to play the rhythm guitar part on *Surfin' Safari*, among others.

"I never used the Epiphone with the pickup beyond 1963, I played bass on most of the rest of the Beach Boys stuff," Kaye explains. "Brian [Wilson] was a really nice young kid, and the first date that we worked with him was typical rock 'n' roll. Every date he'd come up with some different lines. He wrote the music and he'd bring the music to the date, put the music on the stands and then sit down and play the songs for us to get the idea of the style for the songs and then he would retire to the booth."

"Chuck Britz, who was the engineer for these sessions, was showing Brian how to engineer and how to produce. He showed Brian everything about all the booth stuff. Brian was learning fast – every date we did, he improved, and by the third or fourth date this kid was writing some great stuff."

Kaye laughs as she recalls Brian's attempt to communicate his vision in a way the session musicians would understand, "He'd write the music and it would look so stupid, because he'd have the stands on the wrong side of the note and the sharps and flats everywhere! But the music was his and it sounded good. His were the only dates that I didn't have to create a line for. With The Beach Boys, I could read his bass parts. I did manage to invent one little lick on *California Girls* – and he left that in! That was the only time I invented anything for Brian. For everyone else, I invented the bass lines."

In 1963, the famous Motown label opened up an LA office, and Kaye was in at the ground floor... "They started recording out here way before the time that they said they did, because they got us for non-union rates," she notes. "It was cheaper for them, and they had all the hit musicians of Hollywood to do the bass – because James Jamerson and the drummer were out on the road with the Motown group.

"The first date or two that I did for Motown I was still playing guitar. Arthur Wright was the first bass player on Motown in LA and we often used to split the session – he'd play guitar and I'd play bass. In all, they used nine bass players out here from '63 on. They used me the most, and they used Earl Palmer the most on drums. In my log, there are about 150 Motown dates."

## Breaking The Habit

In 1969, Kaye decided to quit doing studio work – she looked back on her early days in the late 50s with fondness, but now felt burned out.

"The singers back then were excellent, but then it got less and less of the great singers and more and more like we've got to turn this person into a star. So we had to create the biggest track that we could to make them sound good. Even though they weren't that good.

"They were asking us to record for people who couldn't sing well, and then they'd write

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**By 1970, Kaye was doing more film and TV work, and trying to do fewer rock 'n' roll sessions**

arrangements from what we'd done. They'd do the rhythm section, then they'd overdub the horns and the strings based on what we'd played. It wasn't fair. They were copying what we did to write the arrangements – now how terrible is that?"

It wasn't just the pressure to create packaged popstars that turned Kaye off, however – as the decade wore on, the LA music scene was changing in other ways, and not in a way that Carol wanted any part of.

"You know I never wanted to play music again – ever!" she exclaims. "I was just so tired – I was worn out. I wasn't getting any sleep and the music had turned to crap. Manson and the [Tate-Labianca] murders happened, people were going to work on drugs... so I quit. I thought, 'That's it, I've had it. I'm not going to do this crap anymore.'"

> "Rock 'n' roll groups back in the 1960s could not play. We were the ones who reinvented lines every night to make a hit record"

As it turned out, Kaye wasn't quite done with music. She returned to session work after a five-month break, but was determined to be much more selective about the jobs she took.

"I came back, and turned down all the rock 'n' roll and all the Motown sessions. But I did work for Ray Charles and Henri Mancini, and I kept doing the movie and TV work because the composers were geniuses – their music was so great. So I did that for a few more years, and went out to play jazz concerts with Joe Pass and a whole bunch of other guys, and life was better."

These days, Kaye devotes a lot of her time to teaching, and thanks to the internet, it's something she can do from the comfort of her home.

"I love teaching on Skype and I teach the real jazz – that's the jazz from the 50s," she explains. "I teach it worldwide. In Europe, Australia, Canada... I teach all over. And I'm teaching the right stuff and to me that's fun, see? I teach former rock and blues players how to play jazz and they love it, and they learn it fast. And they never thought that they could!"

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The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

# THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN TOUCH

You might not have heard of Dave Cobb, but over the last decade, he's established himself as Nashville's hottest producer, with Jason Isbell, Rival Sons, Chris Stapleton, Chris Shiflett and Zac Brown all beating a path to his door. **JOE BOSSO** spoke to the producer/guitarist to pick his Grammy-winning brain about guitars, recording and going to tape...

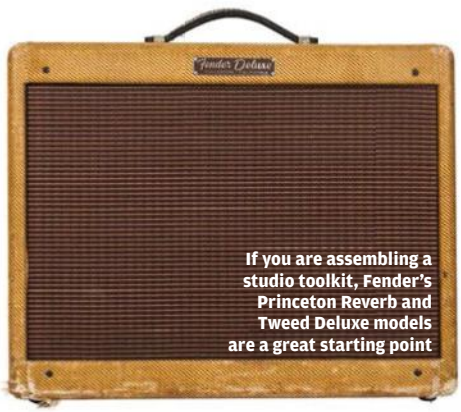
Ask producer Dave Cobb the secret to his sound and the Georgia native will tell you he doesn't have one – that is, a secret or a sound. "I just want the records I work on to come across as honest as possible," says the hotter-than-hot record maker, whose recent resume boasts Grammy Award winners and chart-toppers by Chris Stapleton, Jamey Johnson, Jason Isbell and the Zac Brown Band, among others. "If I had a sound, I wouldn't want to impose it on somebody else. It's their record, not mine."

As well as being a producer, Cobb also knows his way around guitars. Raised on classic rock, he started playing in his teens, and during the 90s he cut his professional teeth as guitarist for the alternative/Britpop band, the Tender Idols. Although he only recorded a couple of albums with that band before relocating to Nashville to try his hand at producing, he says that his first studio experiences helped to form his philosophy about recording guitars.

"I pretty much learned that I had to know what I was doing before we pressed that record button," he says. "It all starts in the player's hands first. If somebody doesn't play what a song needs and doesn't have a good sound, there's very little I, or any producer, can do to fix it. There's no magic bullet that's going to make a bad-sounding part sound great."

And flashy, expensive gear isn't the answer: "It's kind of like putting lipstick on a pig," he says with a laugh. "A player can even use really old, cheap stuff and still sound great. If you know your sound and you know how to get it, you can sound good on anything. Some people are Strat guys; some people are Gibson guys. As a producer, I just try to figure out what sounds best in their hands, and from there I can take a classic amp like a Princeton Reverb and start to build what a track needs – I can insert pedals or whatever. But it all begins with a guitarist who knows what he's doing. There's no substitute for that."

> "A player can use really old, cheap stuff and still sound great. If you know your sound and how to get it, you can sound good on anything"




If you are assembling a studio toolkit, Fender's Princeton Reverb and Tweed Deluxe models are a great starting point

**If you can kind of pinpoint it, where do you think some people are getting it wrong when they record guitars?**

"You know, to each his own. Sometimes too much stuff dilutes the sound. I like pedals as much as anybody, but when they're all in a chain together, they can really water things down. Quite often it's better to just plug straight into an amp. A lot of my heroes did that, everybody from Angus Young to Keith Richards – they just plugged straight in. With the right player, the right guitar and the right amp, what more do you need?

"Also, it's good to listen to your cables. All cables are different. It might seem like a silly thing to talk about guitar cables, but they actually make a huge difference. With older amps, sometimes the cheapest cables can give you the best guitar sound. You have to know how to pair things together. And this might sound strange, but with older pedals, you need to use a kind of a crappy battery with them. Some new kind of battery isn't what they were made for. You can get super-dorky with this stuff, but it makes a big difference.

"I think about my heroes – Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix, George Harrison, all those guys – when they played on these classic records, they didn't have what we now think of as being modern technology, so there was certain matching that happens when you use an old guitar with a cheap cable, and it's just perfect.

**Jason Isbell used a '59 Gretsch Jet Firebird on the Cobb-produced, *Southeastern* album**

© Getty Images

**So when did you first become aware of guitar sounds on records? Who was the first player who knocked you out?**

"For me, it would definitely be Jimmy Page on Zeppelin's first album and *Led Zeppelin II*. When I first heard the guitar solo in *Heartbreaker*, I was like, 'How did you get that? That doesn't sound like the Mesa/Boogie Triple Rectifier.' You know what I mean? All *these* things made me to try to figure out what he was doing. And, of course, you see a Les Paul and you're like, 'God, I gotta get myself a Les Paul.' And then you find out it's a Tele and you're like, 'Shit, now I gotta get a Tele.' You know?

"And then you find out it's that era of Tele, and then you find out a Vox Tone Bender was part of the circuit and that's a big part of it. It goes on and on. You think he's got to be using stacks and then you find out he was using a little Supro combo. You just start going down these rabbit holes, and you start listening to old records and you go, 'God, why did it sound so much cooler than this crazy four-channel amp that's in the store now?'"

**So that's something you did as a teenager? You read about what guys were using and you got into the forensic science of it all?**

"That happened a little bit later. When I was an older teenager, I worked at a guitar shop in Atlanta, and this other guitar player, Peter Stroud, worked there. And Peter knew. He just knew. The owner of the store, this guy George Coats, he knew all the old stuff, too. I was trying to buy the quadruple-gain circuit amp, and they were like, 'Why don't you check out this little Silvertone instead?' And this was in 1990, so nobody was chasing those things. But you'd plug in this $50 amp and you were like, 'Wow, that sounds more like those records than this $4,000 amp does.' Those guys showed me a lot of tricks – turning the volume and tone on your guitar so you could get these different variables out of one pickup. Stuff like that made a big impression on me."

**When you were in the Tender Idols, did that give you a chance to really start experimenting with sounds in a studio?**

"Oh, yeah. And, of course, I ripped off Jimmy Page again. I read about how he used room and close mics to get that sound. I tried it and was like, 'Oh! Now, that's how it's supposed to sound.' All of a sudden there was a depth to the sound that I didn't get with a [Shure SM]57 right on the speaker cone. The old way sounded anaemic to me. So I started fiddling with room sounds and foregoing the close mic."

**Still, though, were there a lot of trials and errors?**

"Sure – I tried everything, man, and I barked up a lot of wrong trees. Look, I'd love it if I could plug into something modern, like a Kemper or something, and I would get the ultimate tone every time without any trial or work. That would be great. Fact is, there is no magic bullet. Every record is trial and error. Hell, one of the greatest guitar tones I've ever heard is by Jimmy Page on *Black Dog* – and that's him going direct!

"That tone just freaks me out. And look at Freddie King – his tones are the coolest. I think he's probably the best-sounding guitar player of all time. Then there's Keith Richards on *Sticky Fingers*. Man, that's so good. And George Harrison – what about his guitar tone on *Something*? That always sounded so magical to me. I listen to all of this stuff and try to figure it out. One of my other favourite guitar sounds of all time is that song *Alabama* on Neil Young's *Harvest* album, That was like a little Fender Deluxe, but it sounds gigantic. They recorded that in a barn."

> "I tried everything, man, and I barked up a lot of wrong trees. Fact is, there is no magic bullet. Every record is trial and error"

**Do you recall a sort of breakthrough moment for you in the studio – the first time where you were like, 'I got it'?**

"Kinda. I remember doing Jason Isbell's *Southeastern* record, and I thought, 'Man, this is pretty close...' It was a close approximation of the tones I love. But you know, I'll attribute that to the way he sounds. He's an insane guitar player. I don't know if I can take credit for it – it's the way he plays.

**Do you remember what sort of guitar, amp and mic'ing approach you were using?**

"I think it was a '59 [Gretsch] Firebird going into a Gibson Falcon amp. And I think it was an [Neumann U] 87 distant mic with another 87 close-miked. But I could have done the same thing with another guitarist and it would have sounded completely different.

And you know, rooms play a huge role in how a guitar rig sounds. I'd read years ago that The Edge liked the sound he got from hallways or rectangular rooms. And he's kind of right about that – something about rectangular rooms makes a guitar amp sound magical. If you put an amp in a little booth, it just doesn't emote. It sounds mean and cold; it doesn't blossom. Although I'll sometimes put guitar players in little rooms, and you get the bleed of the amp into the drums. I like that a lot. It sounds gigantic and dangerous. If you get a sound like that, you don't need multiple guitar tracks. That one guitar part does a lot of work for you."

**What about arranging guitar? You sound like a 'less is more' kind of guy...**

"Oh, I am. I want the definitive guitar part, not a bunch of parts that are just trying for something. There was a point in the 90s when all these songs had, like, 50 guitars on them. It was like this big flood of guitars on tracks that didn't amount to anything. Now, you listen to Eddie Van Halen or Jimi Hendrix – they're only playing what's needed. Their parts are definitive – that's the word I keep going back to. So I rebelled against all the clutter. Your ear gets fatigued by all that stuff.

"I'll sit with a guitarist and have him work out his stuff. Give me one guitar part and make it essential to the song. Give me the hook – just like what Page did in Zeppelin. If you can sit

with the guitar and give me a hook, you don't wind up with a big pile of crap. Tony Iommi knew this – with those plastic tips on his fingers, he played very simple parts. Or James Jamerson on the bass – he played with one finger, but everything was essential."

### Do you have certain amps that you always like to pair with guitars?

"I think it's probably great for everybody to have a quintessential Princeton Reverb and then maybe a Fender tweed of some sort. Then you might want a Vibrolux a Tremolux. A 50-watt Marshall can be quintessential, and of course you've got Vox AC30s with the blue speakers. Maybe I'd add a Marshall JCM800 to the mix, if you want something more modern. Those are great starting places for anybody. There's lots of cool boutique amps being made.

"As far as what guitar to pair those with, I think a Telecaster is the number one guitar of all time. Ask Jimmy Page – it works for everything. I love 335s and Les Pauls and Strats. Sometimes you want a classic Gretsch, like a Chet Atkins. Firebirds are great. I think those are the starting place. It's hard to mess up with one of those guitars."

Cobb is a big fan of the Avedis MA5 preamp

### Artists probably come to your studio hoping that they can play some of your guitars...

"Oh, sure, and they're welcome to them. I do that all the time. I've been using this Gretsch Masterbuilt White Penguin, and it's just amazing. People come in with their guitars, and I'll hand them the Gretsch – they love it. I see them change the way they play when they start in with it. I have some really great old Teles – my '57 Esquire is a monster. I'll put that in people's hands and it just screams. Or I hand 'em my 1960 335 – that's a beauty, too."

### We talked a bit about mic'ing. Do you have any firm dos and don'ts?

"I would never say 'don't' because something may sound good with the mics turned the wrong way. You never know till you try. I remember reading [legendary engineer and producer] Glyn Johns talk about mic'ing. He'd walk into a room and just listen to the amp in the room. Wherever he thought something sounded good to his ear, that's where he put the microphone. It makes so much sense. Too many people just shove the mic up to the cone and then they think they can EQ the shit out of it. No, no. Listen to where the amp sounds good and start from there.

"There's so many tricks that people have done thought the years. You can put a mic near the front of a speaker and then place another mic in the back of a combo – you can get an out-of-phase sound. These old ribbon mics, you never put them right on the amps. You kind of angle them to the side so you don't get a blast from the speaker. I mean, think about it: You never put your ear right up to the speaker, so why do you wanna put a microphone there? So that's my philosophy: Wherever it sounds good, that's where you should put the mic. Don't worry about what you've seen other people do."

### If you have a poorly recorded guitar track, is there anything that can be done to fix it, even a little?

"Truthfully, I'm a big believer in getting it right the first time around. I would try to replay it – that's always the best way to go. I mean, you can try certain stuff if you have to. I've taken an already recorded distorted guitar track and re-amped it through another amp – and then I room mic that. You can give it a little zing that way, because you can blend in the room so it takes away some of the chaos that probably doesn't sound good.

"On the other hand, if you have a complete track that sounds totally messed up, I say the best thing is to mess it up more! Take that mistake and turn it into something – then it sounds purposeful."

### Is there any outboard gear you're a big fan of these days?

"Sure. There's a lot of really good new equipment these days. Spectrasonics is making really good preamps that are great on guitars. And Avedis makes killer preamps – the MA5 is killer. The 500 series is really cool. It's sort of Renaissance period in recording gear, I think."

> "I go to tape probably 50 percent of the time. And if I don't go to tape at first, I'll reprocess it to tape before I mix. I definitely abuse tape!"

### Are you pretty much a tape guy?

"I go to tape probably 50 percent of the time. And if I don't go to tape at first, I'll reprocess it to tape before I mix. I definitely abuse tape!"

### We ask about tape because, let's face it, few people use it anymore.

"Yeah, that's true. Bottom line is: if you're great-sounding guitar player, you'll sound great on anything. If you have the right amp and the right guitar that matches your hand, it's still going to sound great straight to digital. I don't think there's anything wrong with straight to digital. You can cheat with plugins nowadays. You can even buy a cheap four-track or cassette recorder and reprocess it on that, too. And that's a sound. I have a friend in California who uses a cassette recorder for all his slaps and everything. It works.

"But I'm not a snob or a purist. To me, whatever we can do to work really fast is what I'm into. I can't stand people who want to spend a year making a record. Stuff like that always sounds like hell. I work fast and I go for the feel. A lot of times a guitar player will run through a part, but then he'll want to perfect it – he'll want to do 50 takes or something. And you know what? It always sounds better on those first few takes, when he's kind of feeling his way through it. That's when he's got the feeling, and you can't perfect feeling."

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The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

# JOSH SMITH'S GUIDE TO THE PERFECT SESSION

15 years on the LA studio scene turned a former child prodigy from Florida into a seasoned session pro and one of the most respected guitarists in the business. Read on as Josh Smith shares the hard-earned wisdom that'll help you get called back time and time again...

### This Is A Call

"When I get the call, if I've worked with the producer before then I'll have a relatively informed idea of what I'll bring to the session. Or he'll just tell me. If I haven't worked with them before, I'll bring tonnes of gear! I'll bring everything that I think I might possibly need. And that goes hand in hand with having built a toolbox full of all the right tools."

### Sharpest Tool In The Box

"You always need Les Paul, Tele, Strat. Those are the three number ones, absolutely. Then sometimes a 335. I always take one electro-acoustic just to be safe. Sometimes you need oddballs; maybe a Gretsch or a baritone, or a Rickenbacker. A 12-string electric is something in your real life you'll probably use once every 10 years but on sessions it's something I can end up using once a week. It creates a sound that makes the producer go, 'Oh, I didn't even think of *that*.'

"So you need guitars that tick all those boxes, then you need pedals that tick all the boxes. Definitely if you can't bring multiple amps. You may need clean, bright sounds like a Fender blackface thing, but a lot of times producers will ask for something Beatles-y or U2 or Tom Petty, and it's something you can't pull off without a Vox. I typically take one blackface-style amp and one Vox-style amp. If I need the Marshall thing, I'll do it with a pedal."

### Rise And Shine

"Get up early. Have some breakfast and be in a good mood. That's an overlooked step in this business. Be super-prompt and professional. Be the guy that everybody wants to hang around with so they're happy to have you there. I'm always early, no matter what."

### On Arrival

"It could be a serious studio, it could be Capitol Records, it could be somebody's house. A lot of producers have serious studios at their house. The vibe changes depending on where you're at.

"I show up early and load in – I'm usually carrying everything myself – and I talk to the engineer, see where he wants me. If it's a live session I'm going to be in the live room. If it's a guitar overdub session, a lot of times I'll be standing in the control room while my amps are in the live room... so it's just figuring out the logistics.

"When I first moved to Los Angeles, I could count on a lot of sessions every year with major label artists, some of them huge stars, where you were tracking live doing the whole record. Then it switched to nothing but overdubs at producers' houses, because nobody tracks together live anymore.

"It obviously depends on what's popular and what's popular is still pretty bland pop music but there have been things going on in the last couple of years that have helped things swing back the other way, like Alabama Shakes and The Black Keys. It's getting more popular to make a record sound loud and live and have people playing in the same room. Producers are taking note!"

### Listen Up

"Some producers send stuff in advance but most producers want you to show up and just hear it. When you get there, there could be a chord chart, there could be real sheet music already written – which is pretty rare – or there could be nothing, which is normally the case.

JOSH SMITH

Josh came to LA to make his own music but ended up excelling in the session scene

"I'll listen to the song – I'll have to do it with my guitar in my hands because I don't have perfect pitch – once, maybe twice if I need to and I'll write down a little cheat sheet. The important thing is to immediately start coming up with an idea. It may not be the keeper idea but in my head when I listen that first time and I'm writing the chart, I'm thinking of what I'm gonna play and starting to hear things that could be a hook already.

"Then they'll go, 'Are you ready?' And you'd better say yes!"

## Pressure Cooker

"When I moved to LA I had only played my own music. I started getting on little teeny sessions and maybe at the session they'd have a chart. It would say the chords are A, F♯m, B, E or something like that and I'd just play those chords. Then I realised it's not just about that.

"I started listening to what other people were doing. I made friends with Mike Landau and I heard him on a session. He's not just playing the chords, he's coming up with parts for everything, immediately. And that was a skill that took time to learn, for sure. It's a skill I don't think a lot of guitar players realise exists.

"Producers are all different. They all want genius, that's for sure! But what genius is to them is a different thing. Some producers, when they hire you, all they want is for you to come in and give them tonnes. So it's like, 'I need powerchords, straight eighths, then I need a higher version of that, then an arpeggiated part with delay, then I need something weird here in the bridge, and maybe I need an acoustic track just to have it…' so you quickly get in there and do all those things and they'll chop it up later.

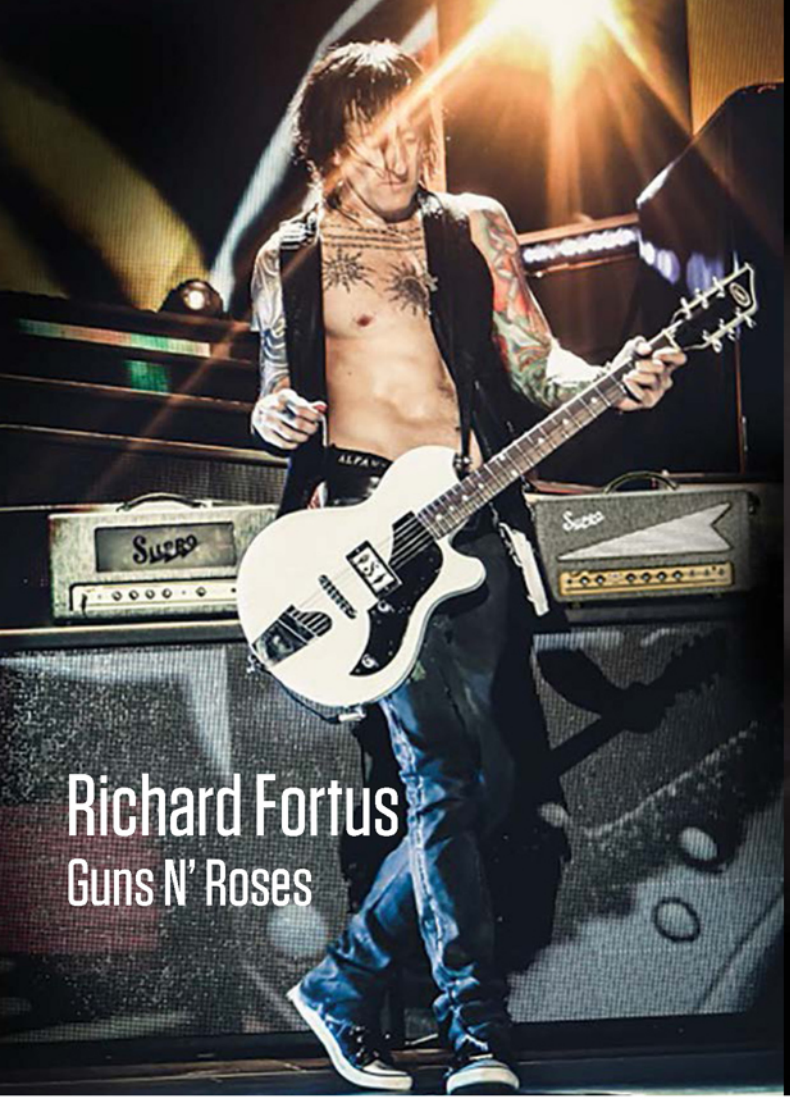
"Other guys, they want to hear what you would really play if it was your gig – maybe that producer hired you because they like what you do and not just because you can play everything perfect. You've gotta kind of read that. Once I get there I know whether they want me to be myself or just to fill in a bunch of boxes."

## Fine Tuning

"Don't just bring the right gear, really have your gear in order. It's a lot easier to work fast if your guitars are in tune, set up properly, don't buzz, your amps don't buzz, the tubes are fine, your pedals and your cables are good.

"That Telecaster may sound great but can you play a D chord and have it sound in tune on a session? It's really amplified when you are in that room playing by yourself, strumming chords. Especially if it's some pop thing where they've quantised the hell out of it and it's got synths on it. That stuff is perfectly in tune 'cause it's all fake, so if your guitar is not perfectly in tune, you hear immediately.

"There's a difference between gig 'in tune' and session 'in tune'. On a gig, if you play with a second guitar player, maybe you'll hear some intonation stuff – but otherwise a lot of times you don't notice 'cause you're in tune

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with yourself. You almost put the guitar in tune with the way you fret and the way you vibrato. But when you get to that session and you are strumming cowboy chords, when you hear it come up the first time through a pair of NS-10s – unforgiving, in your face, super loud – and it's not perfect, you're like... woah!

"I have guitars that I bring to sessions that I never play live. It's not that they don't sound good but when I built my toolbox it wasn't all about the vibiest guitars ever, it was about man, these things get the job done. I have a superstrat that passes the tuning test every time! And I don't own a Paul Reed Smith, but in the last six months I've thought about buying one a few times because they are so in tune. It feels like that would be a good session guitar."

Having a variety of guitars to take into the studio is hugely important for a session

"I'll listen to the song once, maybe twice, and I'll write down a little cheat sheet. Then they'll go, 'Are you ready?' And you'd better say yes!"

### Studio Psychology

"You're selling yourself. You want this producer to call you back again. You want to form relationships with these people because this is how you pay your bills. A lot of producers will ask what you think. Not all producers actually mean it. They don't all want your opinion. But they always ask! I go out of my way to be friendly, do what they are asking, listen to what they say... that's super important.

"If they tell you, 'I really hear a tremolo thing here', you've gotta do that. You might be 100 per cent sure that it's wrong, but you've still gotta go at it and try to give them what they hear! When I come up with an idea I like to give two options so it'll still be their decision. If I hear a delay thing I'll give them two different delays when I know either one will work.

"Reading people is a skill that you learn over time and Jesus... what if the artist is there?! If the artist is there, everything else goes out of the window because the producer is serving them. The artist never stops talking! They are gonna throw their opinion out every second, which they should, it's their music."

### Found In Translation

"I moved to LA knowing I was a good enough guitar player to maybe make it, but I was completely a fish out of water. I only knew how to get my sound. It took a few years of figuring out what everything sounds like. Figuring out what they mean when they say, can you make this U2-ish? What does that really mean? You are expected to be able to nail that thing *and* come up with a cool part for it. That dotted-eighth-with-a-quarter-note, arpeggiated delay thing crosses all genres now.

"When you begin to get a reputation, you get called more frequently to do *your* thing. It happens organically. For me it's Motown, soul, R&B, funk, anything rootsy. But you have to know the buzzwords. If they say Jimi Hendrix it could be bluesy soloing with a fuzz pedal, or it could be that the Curtis Mayfield thing is really what they are asking for. If they say rock 'n' roll it could mean a number of things. You have to have listened to a lot of music.

"The producers who are the most difficult to translate are the ones who don't play an instrument. It's pop music or hip-hop a lot of the time. Music made completely on a grid from loops and beats that are chopped up. Sometimes you have to think completely outside of the box. They might not have a wealth of knowledge but they are telling you, 'I need this to sound scary' or 'I need this to be epic' or 'I need this to sound like I'm gonna kick your ass'. If you don't understand then just give them choices and you may stumble on what they want by accident.

"Build up your knowledge of sounds and your ability to get them with gear, and then build up your knowledge of music and styles. Those are the two biggest things. What if someone says, I want an African thing here? Well shit, if you haven't listened to any of that music you won't have a clue what they are talking about..."

**Josh Smith's solo album, *Over Your Head*, is out now, featuring guest appearances from Joe Bonamassa, Kirk Fletcher and more. Visit www.joshsmithguitar.com to order your copy**

## INSIDE THE BOX

Josh's 'toolbox' has taken years to assemble but it contains a sound for every occasion. His main guitar is a black, ash body Chapin T-Bird but he has other "more session-friendly" T-style guitars that have "more sounds in them," such as his Cornell Dupree tribute guitar made by Scero Guitars, which has a DeArmond Dynasonic in the middle position and a plethora of switching options. "It gets used for a lot of rhythm guitar on sessions," he reveals.

Smith has maple and rosewood 'board Strats but typically only brings one Strat to a session. "Normally if people ask for a Strat it's for the things that only a Strat can do, and any Strat will do that," he says. When it comes to Les Paul tones, "recently I've been using one I got from Germany from this place called Real Guitars. It's a copy of a 1960 Les Paul that I got to spend a lot of time with. It's the best Les Paul I've ever owned, it's incredible."

With Vox and Fender-style amps a permanent fixture in his session rig, when it comes to all out rock, Lovepedal's Purple Plexi is Smith's Marshall-in-a-box: "I can do the Marshall thing through either the Vox or the blackface amp, but I can't do the Vox thing or a Fender thing through a Marshall, it's impossible. I actually run the pedal with the gain all the way down and the volume all the way up. When you use a humbucker guitar like a Les Paul or an SG you get that AC/DC rhythm tone thing."

Other pedalboard stalwarts include the Catalinbread Echorec and Smith's own signature J Rockett Dual Tremolo but the ace up his sleeve is the Eventide H9 multi-effects unit: "It's changed my workflow to the degree that I would say, of my pedals it's the most important thing for sessions. Not because it sounds better than anything else – even though it sounds amazing – it's because it's made it easier to give guys more options immediately, 'cause I can sit there with my iPad on my music stand and I've got literally a million sounds that I can tweak on the fly while the producer is sitting listening to me. And it's true stereo on every patch. In the studio it truly is a game changer, 100 per cent."

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In the studio with producer James 'Lerock' Loughrey

The Secrets Of STUDIO GUITAR

# LET'S GET DIGITAL

Usually when you talk to studio pros and session maestros, the vintage and analogue drums are being beaten rather heavily – but there is another way. Godsticks frontman Darran Charles explains his revelation that digital modelling can be an absolute godsend when tracking guitars...

Until about five years ago, when it came to digital amp modelling, I was one of the most sceptical people you could find. Like most guitarists at the time, I owned a Line 6 Pod that, though a great piece of equipment, I viewed strictly as a practice amp and something I could use confidently and quickly for song demos – I never intended to use on it record and never did. In my mind nothing could ever replicate or replace my beloved tube amps.

In the subsequent years I remained steadfastly immune to the intoxicating celebrity endorsements and big advertising campaigns of newer digital modelling units, especially the Fractal Audio Systems Axe-Fx. I remember scoffing to myself, 'These guys are just metal players! What do they know about tone?' – a supercilious behavioural pattern that always subsequently bites me on the ol' proverbial.

But then something changed. As Fractal's artist roster began to expand to include players whose tone I admired, I was slowly becoming more intrigued.

What finally pushed me over the edge – at least psychologically – was a conversation with Guthrie Govan when my band were opening for The Aristocrats back in 2012. As a co-organiser of the tour, one of my duties included driving him to a clinic in Newcastle [Not the medical kind – Ed]. During the journey, the subject of digital modellers came up. I asked him what he thought about the current trend and the Axe-Fx in particular. I was expecting him to share as disdainful a viewpoint as my own, thinking that he was 'purist' like myself – whatever that means these days! Instead of an outpouring of scorn, however, he told me that he owned one! Not only that, he believed that Fractal Audio had come the closest yet to replicating the true sound of a mic'd up amplifier. Given the sound that Guthrie achieved on record, and the rich, majestic tone I watched him meticulously dial in using just a single-channel amp and a mid-boost pedal every night, this was quite some endorsement. That was the conversation that caused the seed to flower, if you will, and a few months later I had an Axe-Fx in my hands.

When it arrived, I excitedly hooked it up and began playing through the first preset, entitled '59 Bassguy' (modelled after a 1959 tweed Bassman). At the time this certainly wouldn't have been my go-to 'amp' but what was immediately evident was that this was a world away from the digital modelling sounds I'd experienced up until that point. The cabinet emulation especially seemed so authentic (I could hear the air!) that I was already beginning to wonder if anyone could tell the difference between this and a mic'd up speaker cab.

## Pick Up The Tone

Pretty quickly after I started to get to grips with it, I decided that I would use the Axe-Fx for

the next Godsticks album. This was primarily because it sounded so good, but also because I've never had particularly rewarding experiences when mic'ing up cabs in the studio. In the past I'd experimented with different mics, different mic placements, different cabs, and the like, but felt I'd always failed to capture the sound that I thought the amp produced. Of course there are many variables at play when trying to capture a sound – a good producer being vital, for instance – but that said I've never felt that the EQ controls were as responsive as I needed them to be, no matter which amp I was using. With the Axe, I could experiment with different cabs and mics within seconds and thus avoid wasting valuable studio time physically swapping around equipment. So for me, the age old problem of capturing the sound I wanted to hear was solved fairly swiftly.

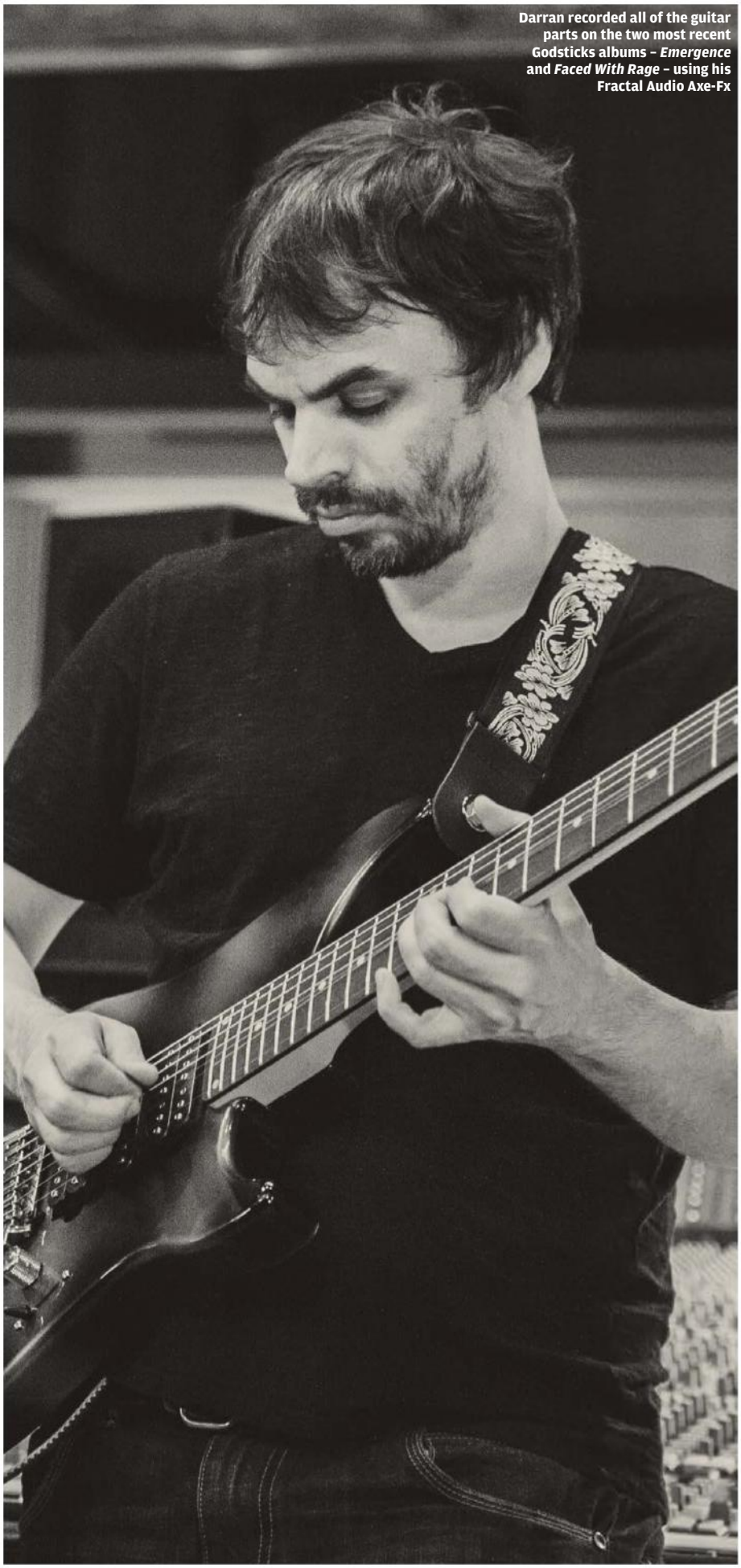
The wonderful thing about the Axe-Fx is that any change in tonal tastes is swiftly catered for, and whatever your holy grail guitar tone happens to be that month, it's usually only a few presets or preset-tweaks away. When I first had the Axe-Fx my main amp was a Mesa Mark V, so the majority of my time was spent on the 'USA Lead' and 'USA Clean' presets, which were emulations of the dirty and clean channels on a Mesa Mark IV. Now these were presets I never thought I'd stray from, but as always, my pompous vows proved to be as fickle as the wind.

Inevitably, my tastes soon altered and I found that EL34 Marshall-inspired sounds were my new sonic soulmate. It didn't cost me the earth to replicate those tones because I discovered that all the classic Marshall sounds were on tap. On the Godsticks album I ended up using the 'Brown Sound' preset (based on a 100-watt Marshall Super Lead with Jose Arredondo mods) for the majority of the album, and the 'Brit 800' (based on a JCM800) for the leads.

The introduction to amps that you either never knew existed or you don't have the money to buy can prove inspirational and fuel creativity, and this proved the case when writing for our latest album. Had it not been for the Axe-Fx, I would never have discovered that a drive pedal in front of an AC15 would produce such a thick, rich, harmonic-laden solo sound – it wouldn't have happened, because that kind of experimentation would be too expensive and certainly not immediate.

While I may sound like a walking advert for Fractal Audio, I promise you that I'm not. I have friends that use the Kemper Profiler and the sounds that it produces are equally as magnificent as those generated by the Axe-Fx. I buy gear chiefly for inspiration, and hand-on-heart the Axe-Fx is the most inspirational piece of equipment I've ever acquired (and I've acquired a lot!). Not for one second do I believe that anything has yet been built that captures the visceral delights of standing in front of a cranked tube amp. But for recording at least, I think that sound is best captured using a digital modeller.

**The new Godsticks album, *Faced With Rage*, is out now on Kscope**



**Darran recorded all of the guitar parts on the two most recent Godsticks albums – *Emergence* and *Faced With Rage* – using his Fractal Audio Axe-Fx**

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# LIFE IS SWEET

Leaving his corporate life behind him, Andy Smith has forged ahead with his dream of hand-crafting boutique valve amps peppered with personality. **MARK ALEXANDER** went to his hideaway in Scotland to find out how Honeyboy amps took flight

The life of an artisan amp builder may sound exotic, but before the accolades start littering your doorstep, there's a good lump of toil and sweat to get through first. It is a commitment that starts with a decision. A point of no return, when you choose to leave behind monthly pay cheques and Monday morning meetings to pursue a nagging spark of an idea.

For Andy Smith, his moment of truth came in January 2016. 25 years of IT work had ended in "soul-crushing horribleness", which led him to take matters into his own hands. Leaving the corporate treadmill behind, he set about building hand-wired, all-tube amps with cool, distinctive finishes from a countryside hideaway just north of Glasgow.

"We wanted to bring to the party hand-built, hand-wired, quality amps that deliver that distinctive vintage tone with that thicker midrange that other amps simply don't have," he explains. "What we add is the extra visual dimension. We didn't want to make just another black or tweed amp because you see them everywhere."

## Honey Pot

True to his word, Smith created the distinctive Honeyboy 5 and 18 guitar amps. Covered in faux crocodile, gator and snakeskin with turquoise, burgundy, rose and seafoam as possible colours; these aren't shy, retiring amplifiers. Rather, these all-tube growlers make an immediate impact both sonically and visually.

The amps have a simple control layout leaving the emphasis on old-school tones generated by circuits reminiscent of those produced by Fender in the 1950s. However, to make the leap from an IT engineer to boutique custom amp builder, Smith first had to spot a gap in the market.

"I play harmonica in an R&B band," he explains. "A few years ago, I bought a really expensive American harmonica amplifier, which cost a lot to import. At the other end of the market, there were a lot of cheap Chinese imports that were being tweaked by changing the valves or replacing the speaker. I thought, 'I can do this to a higher standard than those Chinese imports and give people better value for money without having to import from the States.'"

With the challenge set, Smith set about educating himself in the art of amp design and construction. "When I was in IT, I did cabling, but I had no electronics background. So I read lots of books and taught myself the electronics side. I wanted to build an amp, but I didn't want to follow a kit. I wanted to know how it worked."

He continues: "I built one for myself. It didn't have a finger-jointed cabinet or anything like that. I just screwed it together, but I enjoyed the process. What I loved was there was an end product. In my previous job, I never saw the end product. With this, I planned something and had an end result. That was really satisfying. One of my friends saw it and wanted one as a guitar amp, so I built one for him and then it started to seep through that I could do this as a business."

## Sweet Dreams

Smith made his first amps in 2014, and while his initial goal was to address the gaping chasm between quality and price for harmonica amps, with some refinements he began developing a combo that could do the same for the guitar.

"It was initially driven by the harmonica, but harmonica and guitar amps are very similar. You make certain tweaks," he

explains. "It starts with the signal that comes out of the harmonica microphone as opposed to a guitar. A guitar signal is very small while a harmonica microphone sends out a stronger signal. If you put the average harmonica microphone through a guitar amplifier, the first thing it will do is feedback at you, so you need a lower gain preamp tube. In the circuitry, there are a couple of capacitors that are different for the harmonica. With a harmonica amp you want to boost the bottom end and bring out the lows – give it some force."

He explains that there is also a different speaker for harmonicas, which tapers the high frequencies and allows the mids and bass to come through. With this in mind, you can understand why he opted to follow the tried and tested path followed by amp designers of the 1950s. The upshot for us is the guitar amps he creates – even with the necessary tweaks – have a full, round sound with a fantastic bottom end that oozes natural gain with that unmistakable clarity that transports you to the tweed era.

"They are natural distortion machines," he says. "You get up to four and five and they start to break up nicely."

*"We wanted to make hand-wired, quality amps, but with the extra visual dimension. We didn't want to make just another black or tweed amp because you see them everywhere"*

That punch is aided by the rigidity of the American white oak that is used in the construction of the cabinet, adding greater emphasis and directness to the tone according to Smith. "We settled on oak because the hardwood adds clarity to the overall tone," he says. "We compared a pine cabinet with one of ours and it was a bit woolly because of the softness of the pine. With the oak being rigid, it focuses the tone."

## Blue Print

The proof of the pudding, they say, is in the eating and Smith has been gorging himself on the feedback from both the lead and rhythm guitar players in his band, Used Blues. "The band has two 18-watt amps for the guitarists and I'm using one for the harmonica. In most venues they are sufficiently loud, but we also mic them up through the desk," he says. "They had 35-watt and 40-watt amps before, so I got them to play through a couple of our 18-watt amps and they've never looked back. They're getting some lovely tones out of them, and they love the simplicity of a tone and a volume control; and off you go. Plus, the wife of our rhythm player, who normally has to store his amps up in the back room of their house, has allowed him to keep his Honeyboy in the lounge!"

The amps certainly do away with the sombre look adopted by most top marques. In fact there are 14 different covering styles sourced by Smith's wife Sarah, as well as grille cloths, handles and even pilot lights to choose from. But as pleasing to the eye as the Honeyboys are, all these options and colour schemes would be nothing if the amps were found lacking under the hood. So when lifting up the bonnet, what do you find? >

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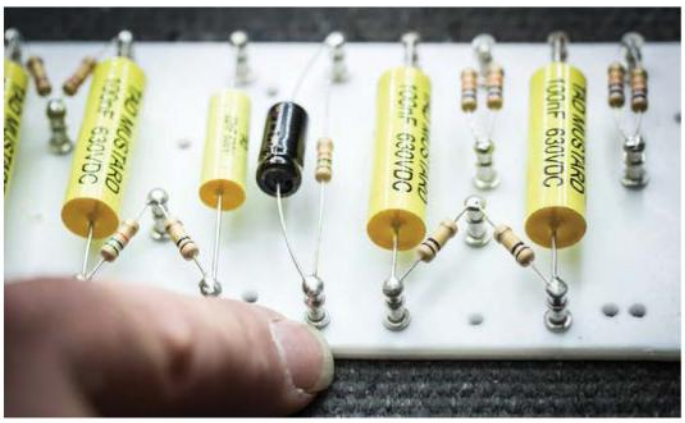
## SMITH ON THE BLUES

**Smith's Used Blues Band only plays covers, finishing their set with *Baby Please Don't Go*. "A lot of my friends are the same age as me; 40s and 50s, and are in bands and like to see live music. We like the grassroots level. I love it when you're either playing or watching and the audience is nose to nose with the band. I like that feel," he says. "We're not like old Delta guys. We're up tempo, rhythm and blues, and I've managed to get some rock 'n' roll in there as well. To me it's good-time music. It's not slow and ploddy like some people think it is."**

For the five-watter, you will notice a 12AX7 high-gain preamp tube, 6V6 power tube and 5Y3GT rectifier tube that pushes the signal through a 10-inch Jensen P10R Vintage-series alnico speaker. An oversized output transformer delivers more volume and deeper bass while orange drop coupling capacitors give clarity and zing to the high notes.

The two-channel 18-watt amp features Tung-Sol 12AX7 and 12AY7 tubes as well as a matched pair of Tungsol 6V6 power tubes and JJ 5Y3GT rectifier. Normal and bright channel high and low inputs, along with normal and bright channel volume controls and a tone control add versatility, all combined with a 12-inch Jensen P12R Vintage-series alnico speaker.

Nifty, portable and forceful when needed, these amps ditch all notions of option paralysis by focusing on the job in hand. There are few reasons to tweak a sound when it is this pure. Saying that, the Honeyboy 5 does have the added benefit of a tight/loose



*"The wife of our rhythm player, who normally has to store his amps up in the back room of their house, has allowed him to keep his Honeyboy in the lounge!"*

character switch, which makes sublime changes to the distortion characteristics.

"Back in the 50s, they didn't want distortion, so they introduced negative feedback that suppresses the waveform," says Smith. "It tames it and stops distortion. Now people want distortion, so we have cut out that negative feedback via the character switch so you get the full extent of the signal."

## Into The Swing

One player who is enjoying the rich textures of Honeyboy's amps is Chris Corcoran, or as Smith calls him; the Swing Supremo. "He's got a five-watt, which he takes to his smaller London gigs," Smith explains. "Because he lives in Kent, portability was important. He's also gigged the 18-watt at The 100 Club. Since then he's developed a set-up where he takes the line out from the Honeyboy and puts it into the power stage of his Vibroverb. He's still got the speaker in the Honeyboy but he's also driving the power stage of the second amp to move more air in a bigger room."

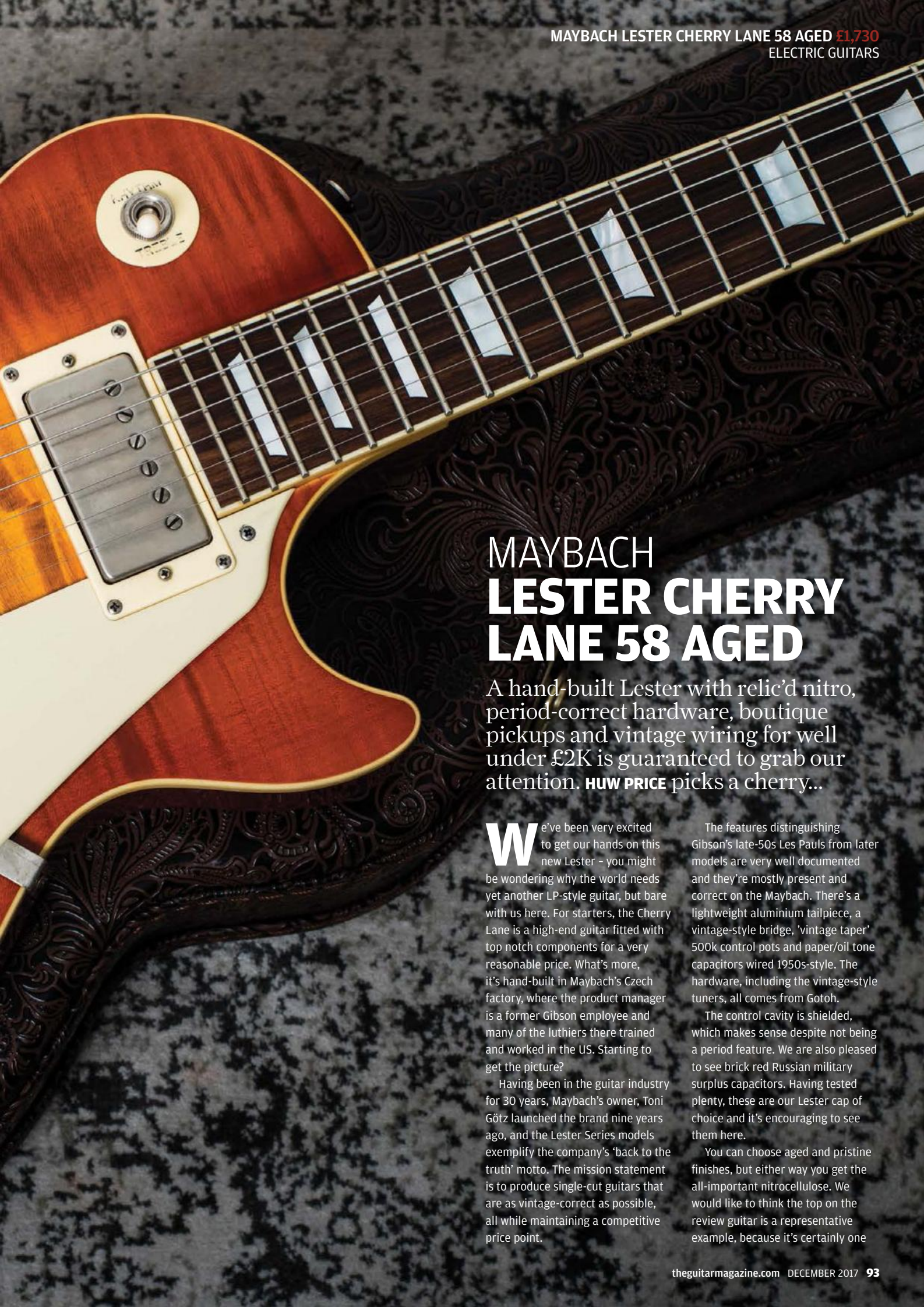
Corcoran is one of the UK's finest blues and swing players. With two albums under his belt and a run of 180 gigs last year, he knows a thing or two about tone. "The amps have a really nice authentic-sounding break up with lots of crunch," says the Jump Blues master. "The distortion is an amazing replication of those old Fender and Gibson amps from back in the day, but they also have a lot of power for gigs."

If that wasn't praise enough, the amps featured in a BBC session for the Paul Jones Blues Show and have received rave reviews on social media. Not happy to stand still, however, Smith is working on a head and a 30-watt combo with a three-band EQ.

With exciting times ahead for Honeyboy amps, there's just one thing to resolve – that name. "One of my heroes is Sonny Boy Williamson and along with my Honeyburst Les Paul and the fact we did some bee-keeping, it kind of just fell into place," he explains. "It certainly started with Sonny Boy, but we realised that other things filtered into the name as well. Tube-driven, warm distortion tone is like honey."

**Visit www.honeyboyamps.com and hear them in action at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine**

MY
HOUSE WORK
IS TO ROCK
THE HOUSE.
THE POWER
OF MUSIC!
th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION



# MAYBACH LESTER CHERRY LANE 58 AGED

A hand-built Lester with relic'd nitro, period-correct hardware, boutique pickups and vintage wiring for well under £2K is guaranteed to grab our attention. **HUW PRICE** picks a cherry...

We've been very excited to get our hands on this new Lester – you might be wondering why the world needs yet another LP-style guitar, but bare with us here. For starters, the Cherry Lane is a high-end guitar fitted with top notch components for a very reasonable price. What's more, it's hand-built in Maybach's Czech factory, where the product manager is a former Gibson employee and many of the luthiers there trained and worked in the US. Starting to get the picture?

Having been in the guitar industry for 30 years, Maybach's owner, Toni Götz launched the brand nine years ago, and the Lester Series models exemplify the company's 'back to the truth' motto. The mission statement is to produce single-cut guitars that are as vintage-correct as possible, all while maintaining a competitive price point.

The features distinguishing Gibson's late-50s Les Pauls from later models are very well documented and they're mostly present and correct on the Maybach. There's a lightweight aluminium tailpiece, a vintage-style bridge, 'vintage taper' 500k control pots and paper/oil tone capacitors wired 1950s-style. The hardware, including the vintage-style tuners, all comes from Gotoh.

The control cavity is shielded, which makes sense despite not being a period feature. We are also pleased to see brick red Russian military surplus capacitors. Having tested plenty, these are our Lester cap of choice and it's encouraging to see them here.

You can choose aged and pristine finishes, but either way you get the all-important nitrocellulose. We would like to think the top on the review guitar is a representative example, because it's certainly one

Kluson-style Gotoh tuners adorn the headstock

The ageing includes lacquer checking and simulated forearm wear

of the nicest pieces of maple we've seen in a long time, the faded cherry colour is just about perfect and the figuring does the 'holographic' thing as you alter viewing angle.

The mahogany back and neck are sprayed in an attractive shade of cherry, although the neck is perhaps a bit on the dark side. Fear not, the extra tint is not hiding a stacked heel or a scarf jointed headstock. This is a one-piece affair with a vintage correct headstock angle and the fabled long-tenon neck joint.

In contrast, the back is a centre joined two-piece and it's weight-relieved. The Maybach team thought long and hard about it, eventually concluding that chambering is the only way to guarantee the sub-nine pound weight of most vintage Les Pauls with the mahogany that is readily available these days.

*This is one of the nicest pieces of maple we've seen in a long time, and the colour is just about perfect*

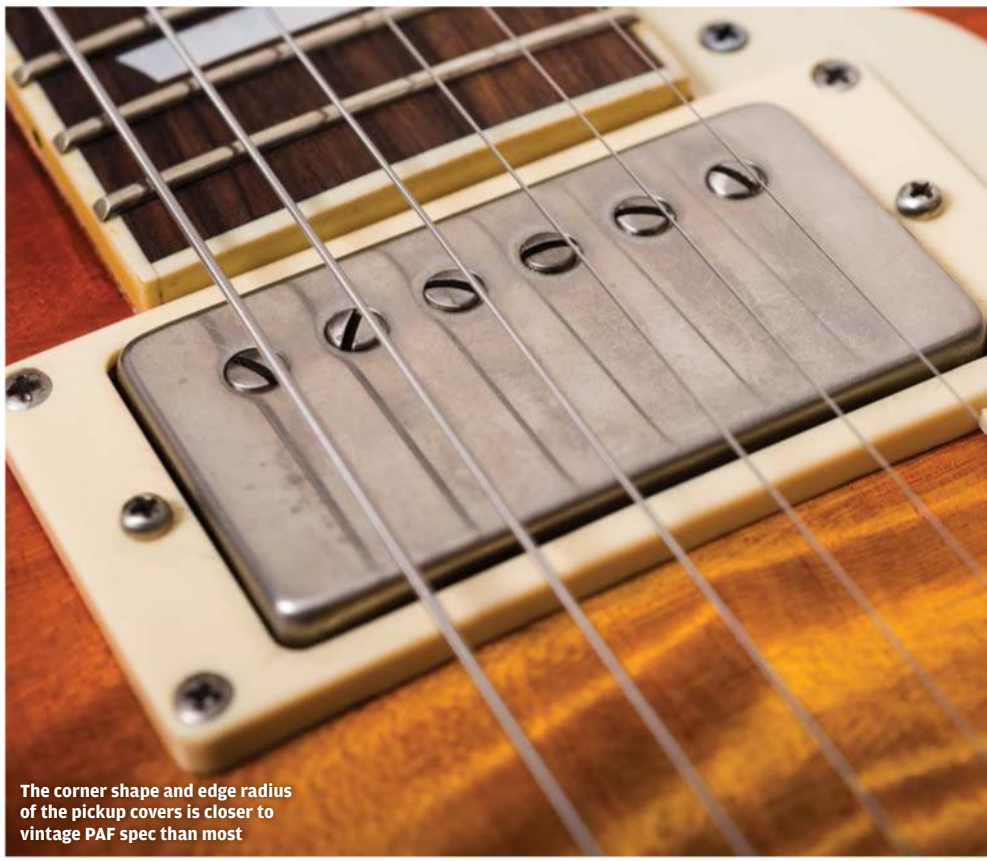
The ageing is quite restrained, with lightly tarnished hardware and pickup covers to match. There's a bit of simulated arm wear at the front, some dents in the buckle rash area and lacquer checking everywhere besides the back of the neck.

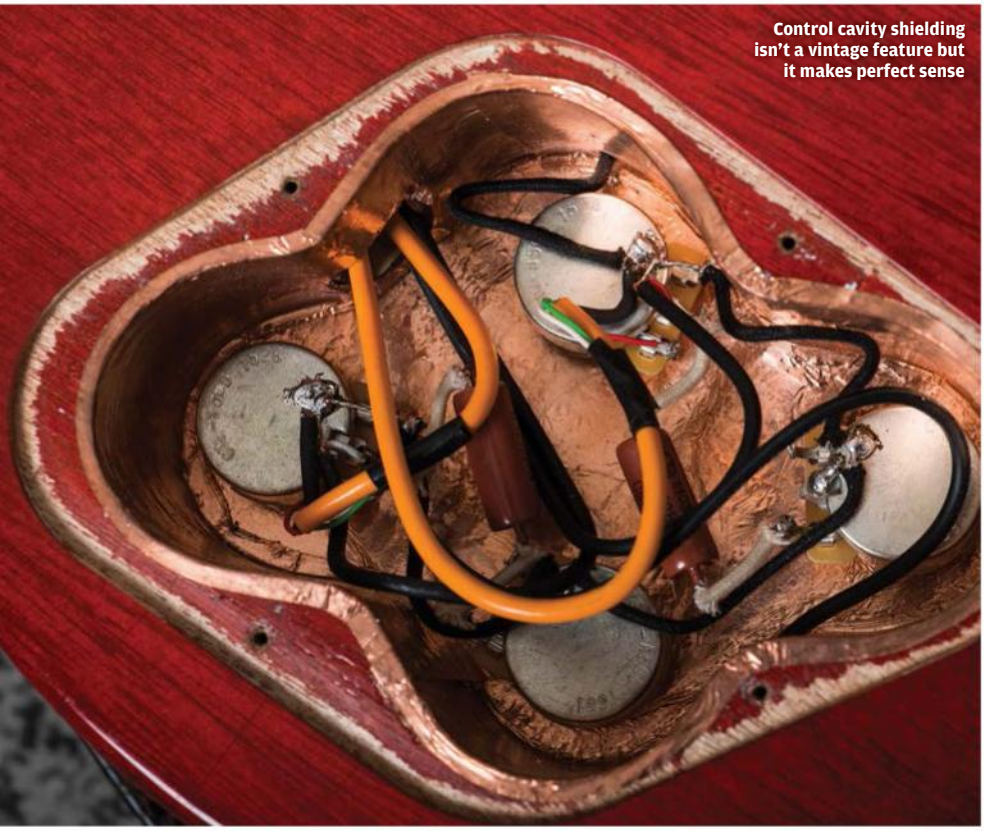
For the most part, it's reminiscent of Gibson-style razor blade work, but this may have been augmented with an air duster at the back, where there is also some crazing. Nobody would be deceived into thinking this is an old guitar, but if you enjoy the relic aesthetic, the vibe of this instrument certainly benefits from it.

The headstock shape may appear to be a subtle and elegant variation on Gibson's iconic design, but it's actually a Larson Brothers design that predates the Les Paul by a few decades. Interestingly Toni Götz also owns the Larson Brothers brand, so it makes sense to 'borrow' the shape for Maybach's Lester Series models.

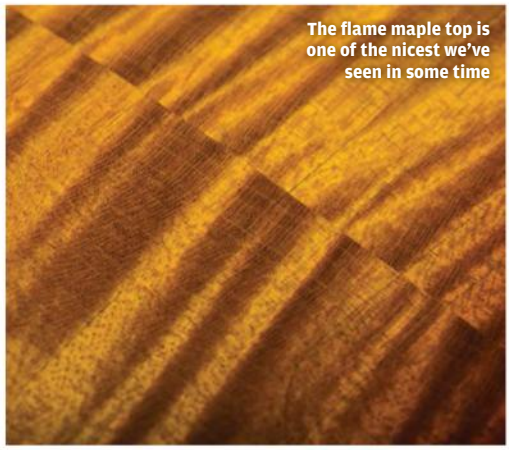
The plastics look pretty good – particularly the pickup surrounds, poker chip, jack plate and pickup rings. We're not sold on the knobs, the off-white switch tip or the rolled pickguard edges, but they're minor details that owners can address with replica parts if they wish.

The frets are installed over the binding, rather than with Gibson-style nibs. On a vintage LP you'd expect the binding to be a fraction

The headstock shape is a vintage Larson Brothers design

The corner shape and edge radius of the pickup covers is closer to vintage PAF spec than most


Control cavity shielding isn't a vintage feature but it makes perfect sense

The back sports small dents rather than full-scale buckle rash


The flame maple top is one of the nicest we've seen in some time

over 1mm in thickness, and we feel the Maybach would look better with something a tad thinner. We also note that the body binding height increases in the cutaway, so there's no 50s-style maple fillet visible here.

Maybach hasn't stinted on the humbuckers. The units in this guitar are hand made in Germany by Amber Pickups. Wolfgang Damm's company is well regarded for its PAF replicas, and these Spirit Of 59s are made to Maybach's specs.

## In Use

Inevitably, the body's weight relief has an effect on the unplugged tone, but not to its detriment. Compared to a Gibson Collector's Choice model and a 1982 Greco copy, the Maybach is louder and fuller bodied. Crucially, there is no apparent diminution of sustain and many will appreciate the semi-solid tonal flavour.

Götz reports that 20 vintage Gibson necks were examined and since they were all found to be different, it was decided to go with a profile that proved popular with a sample group of players rather than replicate any specific vintage neck.

The outcome has a similar depth to many late 50s necks, but a slightly bulkier feel. It's certainly playable, but if part of the appeal of a really high-end LP is the extraordinary feel of vintage-era necks, while the Maybach's more modern square-shouldered profile will be perfect for many of us, it seems rather at odds with the 'back to the truth' concept.

The Amber pickups redress the balance somewhat because the tone is very much in the PAF camp. Nicely microphonic, they interact with the controls just as we would expect from the real thing. Clean up occurs without muddiness, you can fine-tune the quackiness in the middle setting by carefully backing off the neck volume control, and you get that odd anomaly where rolling back the tone controls a notch actually enhances clarity when both volumes are rolled back.

Our experience suggests that original PAFs differed considerably and we find the Ambers are voiced on the darker end of the vintage spectrum. The midrange is also very forward, but that may be attributable to the guitar's acoustic character.

The Ambers compare very favourably with the humbuckers that Gibson is currently installing in its high-end Collector's Choice models, perhaps sounding a bit clearer. They don't quite match aftermarket boutique offerings from Tyson Tone, Throbak and Monty's for upper harmonic complexity or airiness, which means the bridge doesn't quite have the vintage quackiness and pick articulation and vocal qualities aren't as apparent from the neck unit.

However, not all players appreciate that style of vintage Les Paul tone and, in stock form, the Maybach does the buttery smooth and warm blues/rock thing particularly well. When you consider how much this feature set would cost – even second hand – had it emerged from a certain factory in Nashville, the Maybach is a lot of guitar for the money. And while it might not be the bang-on vintage replica at an affordable price that some might have wanted, it's not far off.

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Check out Gibson's weight-relieved **Les Paul Classic Traditional** (**£1,276**), **Les Paul Traditional** (**£1,599**) and **Les Paul Standard** (**£1,999**). The **Eastman Antique Varnish SB59/V** (**£1,769**) features an aged finish and a more vintage-style neck profile

### The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Stunning looks and great playability
+ Very high build quality and impressively light weight
+ Vintage-correct components and wiring inside

- Non-vintage neck profile
- Some binding anomalies
- Weight relief may divide opinion

*As long as the neck profile appeals, this Lester could be the sensibly priced vintage-style single-cut you've been dreaming of*

9/10

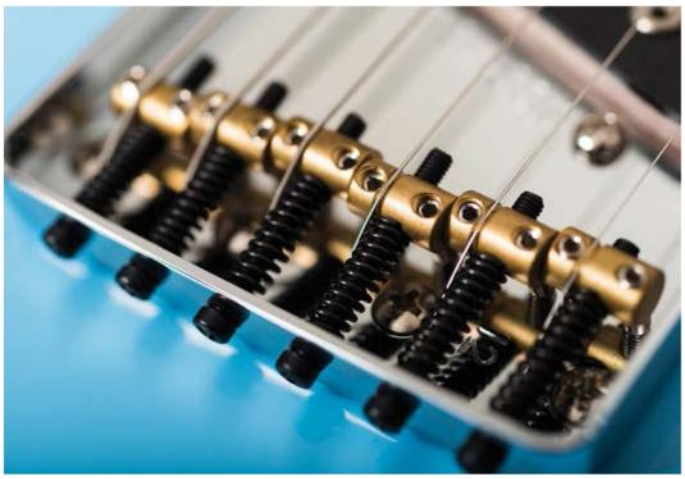
KEY FEATURES

### Maybach Lester Cherry Lane 58 Aged

- **PRICE** £1,730 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid 6-string electric guitar. Made in Czech Republic
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany body with figured maple cap, one piece mahogany neck with long tenon, bound rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium tailpiece & Kluson-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Amber 'Spirit Of 59' humbuckers, individual volume & tone controls, three-way pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.25mm at nut, 53.73mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.525kg/7.77lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Cherry Lane aged nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Havanna Tobacco
- **CONTACT** Maybach Guitars **maybach-guitars.de**

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

SLAP
MIX
REPEAT
EQ
BOOST
JHS



# G&L ASAT CLASSIC

As Mr Fender's 'other' single-cut solidbody powers on into its fourth decade, **RICHARD PURVIS** finds out if it's still got that George and Leo magic...

Long, long ago, the great Leo Fender created a single-cutaway electric guitar with a bolt-on maple neck, two single-coil pickups and 25.5-inch scale length. Then, not quite as long ago, he created another one...

While the G&L ASAT may never match the hallowed status of the Telecaster, Leo's 80s remake has been around long enough now to be considered a bit of a legend in itself. And a deal with Dist-X, Blackstar's distribution division, should make it easier than ever for British plank-pluckers to get hold of one.

Much of the ASAT Classic's design is, of course, all about being quite Tele-like but not too Tele-like. So the basic outline and construction are broadly the same, but an extra curve in the scratchplate and a kink in the headstock make it clear this is not just Mr Fender's tribute to himself. More significant, though, are the pickups. These are G&L's own ceramic MFD types, designed for higher output than regular single-coils.

Other features to note include six individual brass saddles, a shallow-ish 'modern classic' neck profile with 9.5-inch radius and medium jumbo frets, and a bone nut. We're liking this vivid 'Himalayan blue' finish with the parchment guard and maple board, and it's hiding a little secret: for solid colours the body would normally be alder, but there's now also a lightweight basswood option, and that's what's been used here.

## In Use

For our list of complaints about the build quality of this instrument, please check your nearest blank sheet of A4 – it's a classy job, and easily passes the instant playability test that makes a good T-type so likeable before you've even plugged it in. As with the alder-bodied ASAT Classic we reviewed in July 2016, the acoustic tone is unremarkable, but it's certainly big and breezy enough to give those powerful pickups something to work with.

> It has just as much chime in the top end as a Tele, but distinctly more beef in the lower mids

And powerful they are. Taking a standard maple-board Telecaster as our reference point, these MFDs have just as much chime in the top end but distinctly more beef in the lower mids. Be prepared to dial back the gain a bit if your neighbours are home: it's a fuller, rockier sound, and responds eagerly to overdrive.

As so often with higher-output pups, what you gain in power you lose in transparency and complexity – so if you're yearning for that classic Tele 'snap', this probably isn't going to make you a happy picker. There's plenty of bite on the bridge pickup and bags of warmth on the neck, but not a huge amount of phasey cluck in the middle position – this guitar is all about smooth performance rather than character. That, combined with its essential solidity and simplicity, should make it a very effective all-round workhorse.

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ The bridge pickup is a rock powerhouse, and the neck unit's no shrinking violet either
+ Excellent USA build
- If you want traditional Tele tones, look elsewhere

*A classy T-type for those who want a meatier version of single-coil sparkle*

**8/10**

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Your options from the company with Leo's surname include the **Fender American Professional Telecaster** (**from £1,399**). Or you could go for the Asia-made version of this guitar, the **G&L Tribute Series ASAT Classic** (**£459**). For the best of both worlds, why not try a set of **Hot-Rod T90 pickups** (**£110**) in your T-style of choice?

**KEY FEATURES**

### G&L ASAT Classic

- **PRICE** £1,739 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder, ash or basswood (as reviewed) body with gloss polyurethane finish; bolt-on maple neck with rosewood or maple (as reviewed) fingerboard, 9.5" radius; 22 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style tuners, steel bridge with individual brass saddles
- **ELECTRICS** Two G&L MFD single-coil pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.9mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.2kg/7.1lbs
- **FINISH** Himalayan Blue (as reviewed) – over 50 colours are available, see website for details
- **CONTACT** Dist-X Distribution 01604 817817 **glguitars.com**

# FENDER
# '64 CUSTOM DELUXE REVERB

A hand-wired Deluxe Reverb with blackface AB763 innards and a solid pine cabinet is the reissue many players have been dreaming of. **HUW PRICE** discovers if it's worth the wait...

The Fender Deluxe Reverb is great all-round amp that has found favour with countless country, funk, jazz, rockabilly and blues players. At 20 watts there's enough clean headroom for most eventualities, but it's sufficiently low powered to crank up for pub gigs and you can carry it with one hand.

What we have here is Fender's latest recreation of one of its classics, and on first glance the '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb looks like a mint and ultra-clean mid-60s amp – at least from the front. Even so, some may be concerned that Fender tends to 'update' the circuitry of its classic amplifier reissues. It might be suggested that there were reasons those amps became classics, so why not make bang-on vintage-correct replicas and be done with it?

The strength of that argument depends on the product in question, and it should also be noted that many of the vintage amps still being used out there have been tweaked along the way. Indeed, the Fender Deluxe Reverb is surely amongst the most modded of all amplifiers – and often with good reason.

With that in mind, makes sense that what we have here is a mixed

bag of both original and non-original components. For example, although 60s-era carbon composite resistors aren't used in this amp, it does have Fender's Pure Vintage Blue Tone capacitors. These were created to mimic the Astron capacitors used in the originals. Reverse-engineered from the Blue Ajax capacitors that Fender phased in post-1962, the internals comprise the same combination of Mylar, tin foil and wax as the originals.

The '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb also has concessions to the amp's history of modding. Regardless of whether players were after more gain or extended clean headroom, one common complaint with this amp is that the fatter sounding 'normal' channel gets neglected because reverb is only available on the 'vibrato' channel. Fender has obliged by routing both channels through both the reverb and vibrato.

To facilitate this, the opto-coupler tremolo circuit has been reconfigured to a Princeton Reverb-style circuit that modulates the bias of the power valves. The channel voicing has also been tweaked to emphasise the difference in tones, with a 50pF 'bright cap' providing a tad more sparkle on the second channel. According to vintage schematics, the vibrato channel always had an all-but-identical 47pF bright cap across its volume control, but perhaps Fender has altered the recipe elsewhere. Since both channels now have tremolo, the 'vibrato' channel of old has been re-named 'bright' while channel one remains 'normal'.

The Groove Tube-branded valves include a matched pair of 6V6 power valves and a 5AR4/GZ34 rectifier. To comply with modern safety requirements, cages protect the power transformer and the larger valves. The look may be non-original but obviously it's inconceivable that tone would suffer in any way. Our only complaint is that the valve cage obstructs access to the fuse holder.

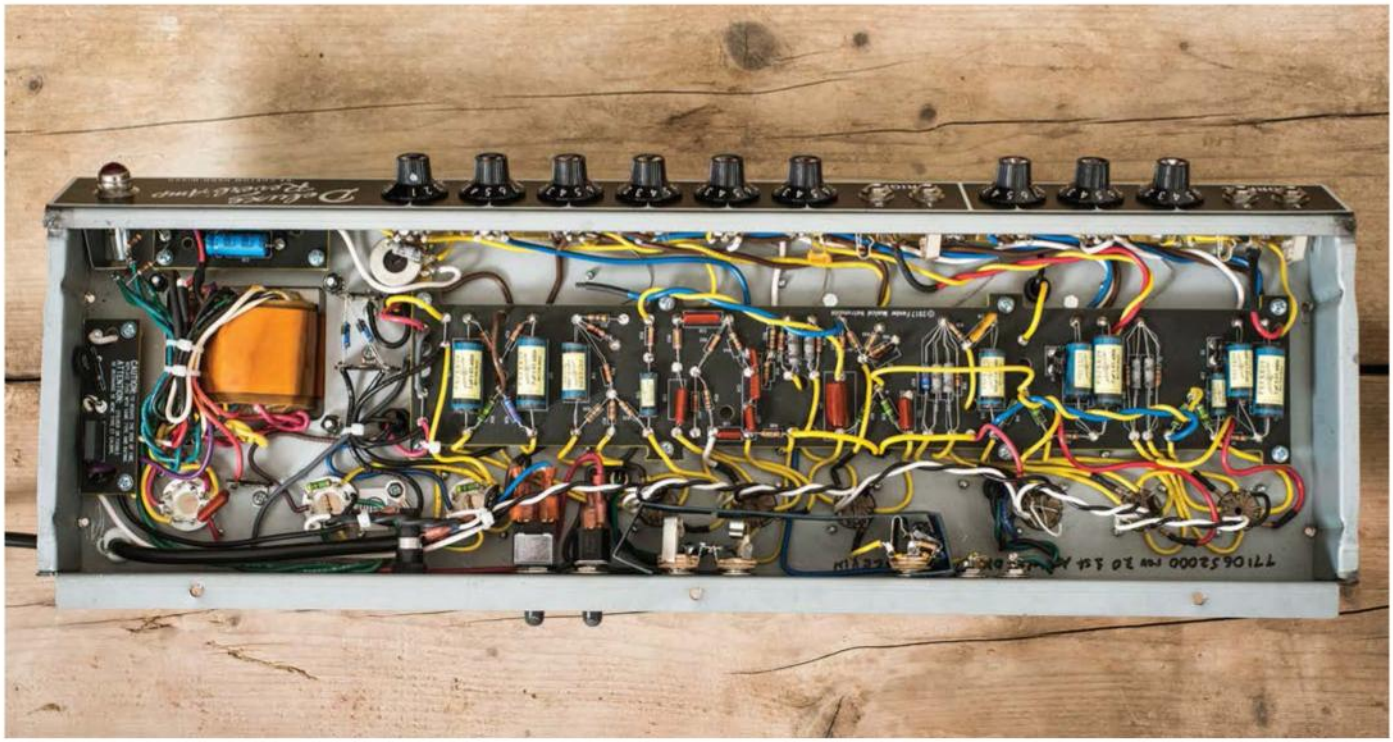
*Inside and out, the build impresses with neat wiring, braided reverb cables and flawlessly applied tolex*

Both inside and out, the build quality impresses with neat wiring, braided reverb cables and flawlessly applied tolex. The '64 Custom Deluxe ships with a slip-over protective cover and a foot controller with switches for reverb and tremolo.

KEY FEATURES

### Fender '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb

- **PRICE** £2,197
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel fixed bias valve combo with reverb and tremolo, built in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AT7, 3x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 5AR4
- **CONTROL PANEL** Volume, treble, bass, volume, treble, bass, reverb, speed, intensity
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker outs, standby, power, fuse holder
- **SPEAKER** 12" Jensen C12Q
- **DIMENSIONS** 429x616x327mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.3kg/38.2lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**



**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Boutique alternatives in the Fendery-sounding camp could include the **Rift Deluxe 22** (**£2,059**) or **Carr Sportsman 112** (**£1,799**). Alternatively, typical prices for original **1960s blackface Deluxe Reverbs** currently range between (**£1,800-£2,200**)

## In Use

Both channels sound very similar. Set identically, the gain level and tonal character are basically the same. Only the bright channel produces the shimmery extended treble that we look for in this type of amp, although the same result could be obtained with a single channel and a bright switch.

However, with an external channel switcher, you might consider setting the normal volume higher for thick overdrive while running the bright channel on the edge of breakup for chord work and cutting lead lines.

Strat pickups begin pushing the amp's bright channel into overdrive with the volume control set between four and five, and the amp's sensitive response allows you to control the amount of drive through your playing dynamics alone. Swapping over to low-ish output PAFs, overdrive begins around a volume level of three.

Thanks to the larger cabinet, the Deluxe Reverb has a bigger and more room filling presence than a Princeton Reverb. Sticking with the Strat and cranking up the bright channel volume, quickly edges you towards a certain Texas tone. It's thrilling stuff as the power supply begins to sag, the mids get chewy and single notes drift into singing sustain.

The Jensen C12Q ceramic speaker has a massive influence on the tone and dynamic response. At the highest volume levels, the bass end gets loose and a tad spongy, but we find that more enjoyable for rootsy playing styles than stiff lows.

Since the effect isn't apparent until the Deluxe Reverb is overdriving heavily, cleaner country pickers and fingerstylists will appreciate the subtle and natural compression that the circuit and speaker combination provide. We also find this circuit brings out the best from Fender-style single coils and Filter'Trons, but humbuckers can sound a bit bland.

Comparing the speaker to a Celestion G12 Greenback – a popular DR retrofit – we think the Jensen is a better fit. It softens the attack, sounds smoother in the upper mids and enhances overdrive with sweet and complex harmonics.

The overall tone of this amp is hugely enjoyable and versatile. There's some noticeable hiss – sharing the reverb over two channels created a similar issue with the Custom Vibrolux Reverb Reissue from the mid-noughties and we wonder if it's a similar story here. Our review amp also produces a rapid chugging sound that's unrelated to the tremolo, but thankfully it's not audible when playing.

Besides that, it's all good. We particularly like the way that the midrange isn't scooped out excessively by the tonestack. Additionally, the mids fill out as the volume is cranked and the bright cap's influence lessens. Thereby harshness is automatically avoided at high volume without any need to adjust the treble control.

The tremolo isn't the deepest we've heard and compared to some modern amps the upper speed range is a bit restricted. If that's vintage-correct, then so be it and we do like the rise and fall characteristic. The reverb fares better and it's everything you could ask for from a vintage-style, tube-driven Fender reverb – complete with that narrow window between too little and too much.

Compared to a 1972 Deluxe Reverb we used to own, this amp breaks up sooner and has far greater touch response. The differences are probably attributable to the circuit changes Fender introduced at the end of the 60s, but if that silverface amp had sounded more like this blackface model, it would never have been sold...

### The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Glistening blackface cleans and throaty overdrive at reasonable volume levels
+ Impressive build quality
+ Luscious tube-driven spring reverb

- Some noise issues
- Bass gets loose when pushed
- Tremolo isn't the most versatile

*It's a touch on the noisy side, but this is a well-built and fine-sounding Deluxe Reverb. It may not be the exact vintage replica some might hope for, but the classic tones are all here*

**8/10**

# boonar

## MULTI-HEAD DRUM ECHO

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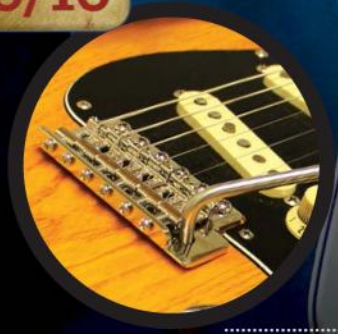
*"I have to say as a Vintage Strat guy, these guitars are exceptional. I was hoping the reload program would enable me to get the same sounds as my original 61 & 63 Strats have. I was so blown away by the first Strat, I ordered a second Candy Apple one!"*

**Mark Boughton, lead guitarist**
**Lorise Eton & the Stealers**

*"The difference in tone, length of note, and feel was unmistakeable. The bridge undoubtedly had more effect on the guitar than the new pickups"*

**Fitzy, The Maddie Jones Band**

Guitar AWARD
EXCELLENCE
10/10

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Satellite
AMPLIFIERS
CUSTOM MADE

# SATELLITE **NEUTRON**

## Still slightly under the radar, Satellite amps offer great value in the hand-wired world, but does the Neutron live up to its promise as a boutique bomb? **HUW PRICE** finds out...

Based in San Diego, Satellite amps main man Adam Grimm specialises in no-nonsense circuits that have found favour with players as diverse as Social Distortion's Jonny Two Bags, Counting Crows' Dave Bryson and the late Walter Becker of Steely Dan. In addition, similarly stripped-down guitars and effects have recently been added to the brand's catalogue.

This Neutron combo is brutally paired back, resulting in an almost industrial focus on functionality and barely a nod to decorative flourish. And it works: the visual contrast of the black tolex against the mid-century modern texture of the speaker cloth is pretty striking.

That said, the tolex application is a little gappy at the corners, and the rudimentary lettering on the brushed aluminium control plate and the parts outlet style handle and knobs create the impression of an amp constructed by a gifted garagista rather than a slick production facility. Even so, the hand-built vibe appeals and where it matters – inside the amp – things are pin-neat.

The cabinet dimensions are roomy for a single 12-inch Heritage Series Greenback and inside the chassis it's a similar story. The transformers are made by Mercury Magnetics and tucked into the corner next to the pair of 12AX7 preamp valves (as far as possible from the power supply) there's a diminutive turret board playing host to a handful of components.

*In essence, the Neutron is a stripped-down single-channel version of an old Marshall 18-watter*

Those resistors that carry the greatest burden are wire-wounds, but the rest are all carbon composite types. Where necessary, high-quality electrolytics have been fitted, and all the signal capacitors are Mallory 150 metallised polyester types found in so many classic guitar amps.

The aforementioned preamp valves feed into a pair of cathode-biased EL84s. It seems pretty clear what this amp is all about and since there are so few components inside, it's easy enough to figure out the circuit. In essence, the Neutron is a stripped-down, single-channel version of an old Marshall 18-watter, but with a 5Y3 rather than an EZ81 rectifier valve.

The Neutron has just two controls for you to play with – volume and tone – plus two inputs. Also top-mounted is a three-way power switch providing standby, off and on modes. The amp connects to the speaker via a jack socket mounted on the underside of the chassis. The onboard Celestion speaker is rated

**KEY FEATURES**

### Satellite Neutron

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **DESCRIPTION** 1-channel cathode-biased valve combo. Made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 18W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7, 2x EL84, 1x 5Y3
- **CONTROL PANEL** volume, tone, power
- **REAR PANEL** 4/8/16-ohm
- **SPEAKER** 1x Celestion Heritage Series G12M
- **DIMENSIONS** 500 x 560 x 260mm
- **WEIGHT** 19.1kg/42lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815

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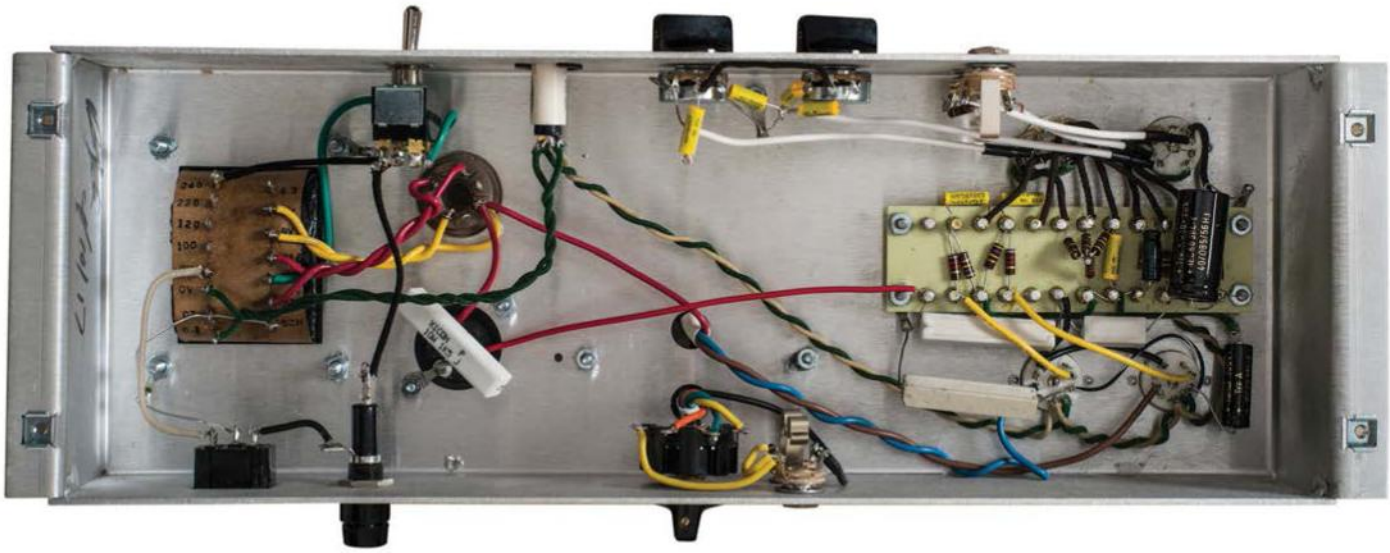

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Other toneful boutique amps sharing the 18-watt inspiration include the **Dr Z Carmen Ghia** (**£1,329**), **Car Lincoln** (**£1,899**) and **Swart Mood 84** (**£1,699**). All are well worth checking out...

at eight ohms but an impedance switch also allows you to connect the Neutron to external cabinets with a four-, eight- or 16-ohm load.

## In Use

The Neutron doesn't ship with a manual and although you may feel confident about being able to figure it out after a nanosecond or so of head scratching, all is not quite as it seems. The volume and tone controls are extremely interactive because both effect gain and treble content – albeit in slightly different ways. Then there are the inputs; rather than the usual dull and lifeless sounding 'low' input paired with a 'high' input that will almost certainly be the only one you'll ever use, the Neutron offers two genuinely viable options.

Starting with the tone control at noon and a Strat plugged into the low input, the volume knob barely completes an eighth turn before the onset of overdrive. Move the volume another eighth turn and rather than a noticeable increase in level or overdrive, you get a thickening of the midrange into a smoother Vox-like quality. This midrange push continues, along with slightly increasing overdrive, for a further half turn until the overdrive begins to increase exponentially and an upper harmonic mist drifts across the top.

Once volume passes this take off point, the tone's equalisation function is largely negated and instead it simply adds harmonic richness to the overdrive. The interesting stuff happens when the volume is cranked and you start turning the tone control below its halfway point because overdrive levels stay much the same, but you get a midrange scoop. This de-emphasising of the midrange accentuates the bass and treble so, in an unexpected way, turning the tone down makes things seem brighter plus it tightens the bass. The tone control only behaves as a treble roll-off in the bottom quarter of its range.

The result of all of this is that the Neutron offers a real mixture of sounds depending upon where you set the controls. You can certainly get a ferocious vintage British crunch with massive bite and harmonic complexity. However, the Neutron has a player-friendly smoothness and touch compression that makes it somewhat less brutal than some similarly spec'd boxes. There are Plexi and tweed characteristics, although the balance is shifted towards this side of the pond.

*It has a player-friendly smoothness and touch compression that makes it less brutal than similar boxes*

Once you have sated your thirst for overdrive, exploring the Neutron's subtler capabilities reveals some welcome surprises. Knock the volume back a smidgen and set the tone about a third of the way up, and the searing harmonics relax into a sweetly saturated and delicate shimmer that is reminiscent of both the best Marshalls and late 50s Fender circuits. As the compression loosens its grip, the Neutron opens up and becomes more responsive to playing dynamics and guitar control adjustments.

Switch to the high input and you can take things in the opposite direction. The input signal brutalises V1, leaving virtually no headroom for clean playing. By cranking up the volume and rolling the tone control all the way back, sufficient gain remains for the Neutron to muscle its way into early 50s tweed Deluxe territory with thickly saturated mids. Wind up the tone and it gradually eases towards the fuzzy, splattering distortion of a 5E3.

Once you figure out how they interact, the somewhat counter-intuitive controls are a major plus point for this amp because they provide such a wide range of tones and overdrive textures. They also behave almost exactly like the controls on the Marshall 1930 Popular combo we fixed up in the October issue.

The Neutron can certainly handle the Brit crunch thing, but it isn't shackled to a single iconic tone. On occasion, we find ourselves craving a little more clarity and bass-end definition – especially with humbuckers – but only when using the high input and pushing the Neutron to its outer limits. Honestly, how many of us have the freedom to do that these days anyway?

### The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Surprisingly versatile
+ Player-friendly dynamics
+ Top-notch components and solid but portable build

- Cosmetics could be neater
- Soft bass end when maxed out
- Lows aren't going to suit de-tuners

*As well as doing the 18-watt thing very convincingly, the Neutron has a range of tweed tones and more than a hint of Voxiness to boot*

**8/10**

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# DAWNER PRINCE ELECTRONICS **BOONAR**

The Binson Echorec is one of the most revered vintage echo units and the Boonar promises to capture its magic in a stompbox format. **HUW PRICE** finds out if DSP beats the drum...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

With only so many vintage echo units to replicate, it's hardly surprising that others are in the Binson game. Check out the 12-headed **Catalinbread Echorec** (**£186**) and the tube-driven but single-headed **Guru Amps Echosex** (**£342**)

Many vintage echo effects were great sounding units, so long as you had the expertise, budget and patience to keep them running. They were also bulky, required mains power and 'true bypass' was never an option.

As the years rolled by, some players stuck to their beloved antique echos, preferring character to the sterile convenience of early digital devices. Others gleefully abandoned their Space Echos, Echoplexes and Binson Echorecs during the 1980s... only to regret it later.

In the guitar world, cutting edge digital technology is increasingly directed towards recreating the tone, foibles and technical 'shortcomings' of vintage gear. Better still, talented designers are melding digital processing with analogue signal paths that are similar or even identical to the original units.

Croatian firm Dawner Prince is one of these companies, and the Boonar is essentially a Binson in a BB box. On the outside, designer Zoran Kraljevic recreated the Binson's black and gold colour scheme, while on the inside FETs replace the valves and DSP replaces the spinning magnetic drum.

Although compact, the Boonar has controls for virtually every parameter and four 'playback head' buttons replace the Binson's original rotary switch. This provides the Boonar with up to 16 head combinations compared to the Binson's 12.

Accessible through holes in the chassis, there are also 'hidden' controls for drum age and input level. You can use the trimmers to set and forget or utilise the mini controls provided for easy access. Inside, a third trim pot sets the dry signal level and dip switches provide tails/true bypass and original/modern input impedance options.

The swell/repeats footswitch requires explanation. Repeats

mode is the standard setting and it provides repetitions determined by how the swell control is set. Swell mode introduces a portion of signal from all four playback heads into the Boonar's output bus to create a dense and echoing reverb type effect.

## In Use

Select the first head, turn the swell and drum speed up high and, rather than echo, you get a very fine roomy reverb effect with a slow and subtle pitch shift on the decay. Hitting the swell/repeats switch intensifies and deepens the effect to create the illusion of an even bigger space.

Take the speed down to half way, deactivate the swell/repeat switch and minimise swell to enter slapback city. Even with a single repeat, the Boonar somehow makes a guitar sound more 3D and lively. Compared to a Catalinbread Belle Epoch in slapback mode, the Boonar is clearer and brighter with more shimmer but less thickness and drive in the mids.

When used individually the playback heads should just alter the delay time range of the drum speed. Although we wouldn't swear to it, it does seem as if each head has a slightly different voicing. The fun really starts when you begin using the heads in combination, and the possibilities here seem endless.

With high swell settings selected, the Boonar takes a trip towards ambient psychedelia. Set the volume and bass/treble just right and you can get harmonious and breathy pad effects under picked arpeggios and held chords. Even switch clicks and finger scrapes spin off into wild atmospherics. Back off the swell and brighten up the tone in order to make the echoes become more precisely defined, and you are soon lost in complex rhythmic patterns, as the Boonar virtually plays along with you.

The removable input and drum age trimmer controls are a stroke of genius. Both of these can edge the Boonar into lo-fi loveliness as cranking the input adds a hint of fuzzy breakup and 'ageing' the drum morphs the tone from a glistening shimmer into a darker and thicker soup where the modulation effect becomes more apparent.

In tails mode the 'bypass' tone is noticeably coloured. The Boonar imparts a glassy bite to the upper mids and a percussive thwack that anybody familiar with David Gilmour's earlier recordings will instantly recognise. Tails mode enhances cut, clarity and detail while adding a hint of compression.

*The fun really starts when you begin using the heads in combination, and the possibilities here seem endless*

We are not convinced that the true bypass mode is quite what it purports to be, and the original/modern dip switch is the giveaway here. Essentially it sets input impedance, toggling between the vintage-correct 47K and a contemporary 1M. Original mode is darker and warmer while modern is brighter and seemingly louder, and the contrast is apparent even when the Boonar is switched off with the true bypass mode selected.

The modern mode actually sounds closest to the sound of the guitar plugged directly into an amp, but when the effect is activated, this situation is somewhat reversed. Original mode might be described as a deliberate impedance mismatch, and it's a feature common to vintage Roland Space Echos.

All echo pedals generate repeats of the input signal so, in theory, they should sound much the same. Instead they are characterised by their tonal colouration and the way they feel to play. Some may seem to fight against you and clutter up proceedings while others gel seamlessly with your playing to provide a distinct effect without getting in the way. The Boonar most definitely falls into the second category because, irrespective of drum speed or head selection, it always manages to groove along nicely and the tonal enhancement is undeniable.

We are particularly impressed with the modulation. Many digital pedals that are designed to emulate analogue echos also feature modulation, but it's often too regular and exaggerated to be entirely convincing. Not so the Boonar – it sounds so natural and musical, and is very much in the spirit of a classic Echorec unit.

This is a retro-flavoured do-it-all echo pedal with a fantastic set of features and one very important distinguishing characteristic – it makes even the mundane sound beautiful. The question is, would an echo aficionado such as David Gilmour actually use one? Well, yes, actually – the Floyd legend has one on his pedalboard, as does John Mayer. What further endorsement do you need?

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ Inspirational, hugely versatile tones
+ Extremely compact
+ Easy to power

- Power supply only
- Comparatively expensive

***An endlessly fascinating, occasionally unpredictable and always beautiful sounding digital simulation of the classic Binson Echorec, which comes with David Gilmour's seal of approval***

**9/10**

**KEY FEATURES**

### Dawner Prince Electronics Boonar

- **PRICE** £299
- **DESCRIPTION** Hybrid analogue/digital echo pedal. Made in Croatia
- **CONTROLS** Volume, bass/treble, swell, drum speed, 4x playback heads, swell/repeats, on/off, input, drum age
- **POWER:** 9V PSU
- **CONTACT** Dawner Prince +0385 955 497328 **www.dawnerprince.com**

# ELECTRO-HARMONIX
# OPERATION OVERLORD ALLIED OVERDRIVE

EHX's tenuously-named new drive pedal is a secret weapon for multi-instrumentalists. **RICHARD PURVIS** gets ready to party like it's 1944...

**KEY FEATURES**

### Electro-Harmonix Operation Overlord Allied Overdrive

- **PRICE** £140
- **DESCRIPTION** Mono/stereo overdrive and boost pedal. Assembled in the USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, treble, mid, bass, dry blend, boost level, gain; three-way input level switch; bypass footswitches for overdrive and boost; internal dip-switch for enabling independent boost mode
- **FEATURES** Mono/stereo inputs and outputs, buffered bypass; powered by 200mA 9V DC adaptor only (included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 120x114x52mm
- **CONTACT** Electro-Harmonix **www.ehx.com**

As Electro-Harmonix continues to expand its vast pedal fleet, coming up with names for products must be getting harder and harder. Take this overdrive, designed to work as well with bass, keyboards and synths as it does with guitars. It's been named after – what else? – the Allied invasion of Normandy.

It does make sense, almost, if you imagine those different instruments as the allies, brought together by the Operation Overlord's stereo connectivity, switchable input levels and dry blend control. For us guitarists it's straightforward: use the mono sockets, set the input level to normal and keep the dry signal at zero (at least to start with); then you've got a standard JFET overdrive with active three-band tonestack and switchable pre-drive boost.

It runs on nine volts, but needs a higher current than a PP3 battery can manage, so comes with its own 200mA power supply. As is the EHX way, this unit is assembled in New York using Asian components.

## In Use

So, should we be expecting a sonic assault, the musical equivalent of the opening of *Saving Private Ryan*? Nah. The core sound with gain below halfway is as pleasant as a walk on the beach with not a cloud (or a mortar shell) in the sky. It's clear and full, gritting things up with very little compression, and the active controls are responsive enough for all but the most drastic of tonal tweaks.

It gets pretty rocky, in a disciplined kind of way, when you whack up the gain – and even more so when you give it a shunt with the deep, growling boost circuit. This is a serious 'whump' enhancer, but be aware it isn't really intended as an independent boost effect – you can't even engage it on its own without flipping an internal dip-switch first, and once you've done that you'll quickly realise it's voiced too dark to be much use without the drive. It's a pity the boost doesn't have its own treble control, rather than sharing the overdrive's tone circuit.

And those other added features? The input selector works well at ensuring gain levels are about where they should be no matter what you plug into the Overlord, and you can also use this creatively as an added cut/boost switch. The 'dry' control is also more useful than you might expect, allowing you to blend clean and lightly overdriven tones to highly musical effect.

Bass players in particular will enjoy playing with this feature – and that's true of the pedal in general, as its natural grind and full-bodied voicing are well suited to the thudstaff's lower frequency range, with or without some bypass tone dialled back in.

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Everyone seems to be sneaking a switchable boost into their overdrives these days. Other examples of the two-in-one formula include the **Keeley D&M Drive** (**£229**), **Tech 21 Boost Overdrive** (**£179**) and **Mad Professor Twimble** (**£199**)

### Guitar VERDICT

- + Nice mid-gain drive tones for guitar, bass and beyond
- + Pre-drive boost adds body and compression to the sound
- + Blend control is surprisingly useful
- – Boost can sound extremely murky on its own

*A fine-sounding overdrive that could be handy to have around for non-guitar duties as well*

**8/10**

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# KEELEY
# CAVERNS V2

No room on your pedalboard for separate reverb and delay boxes? **RICHARD PURVIS** explores the latest doubled-up delivery from Robert Keeley

**KEY FEATURES**

**Keeley Engineering Caverns V2**

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay and reverb pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Reverb blend, decay, warmth, rate/shimmer, three-way mode switch (shimmer, spring, modulated); delay blend, time, rate, repeats, three-way modulation switch (off, deep, light)
- **FEATURES** Powered by 9V mains supply only (not included); delay and reverb have independent internal dip-switches for true bypass or trails and normal or system switching mode
- **DIMENSIONS** 120x94x48mm
- **CONTACT** Robert Keeley Engineering **robertkeeley.com**

The original Keeley Caverns was an instant solution to one of the great guitar debates of our times: which is better, delay or reverb? Putting both of them in one pedal, with fully independent control of each effect, meant the question no longer needed answering. All band arguments ceased, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, sort of, because Keeley clearly thinks there's room for improvement, and now we have V2. This is a wider unit, with room for eight full-size knobs instead of fiddly mini-pots, and much more space between the two footswitches – an important change for those of us who don't gig in ballet pumps. Keeping the in and out sockets at the top rather than on the sides means it's still a pedalboard-friendly unit, but we do have a minor design grumble: those eight knobs are mighty close together, making it difficult to adjust anything without the use of tweezers.

In terms of functionality, the plate reverb has changed to a spring, the maximum delay time has come down from 950ms to 650ms, and we can now choose between true and buffered bypass for each effect (with those all-important trails) via a pair of teeny internal switches. Back on the top, there's also a new three-way switch for the modulation on the delay – off, deep or light – to match the reverb mode switch on the left.

## In Use

Draw an imaginary line down the middle of the unit and it's easy to find your way around each of the Caverns V2's two effects. The delay has been designed to emulate a tape-driven unit, and there's no shortage of tape-style wobble with the blend control anywhere near halfway up, especially with modulation set to deep. The softened treble response is also as it should be, meaning you can push it pretty hard without the repeats getting too insistent.

*The delay has been designed to emulate a tape-driven unit, and there's no shortage of wobble*

This is one of those delays you can happily set to infinite repeats, then play around with the time control to hear your signal screech up and down while becoming ever more scrambled – an effect that's only enhanced by adding a hearty dose of shimmer reverb.

Speaking of which, the reverb side on its own is every bit as tasty as the delay. Modulated mode adds a subtly flangey swirl, spring has plenty of tremolo-like judder, and shimmer brings in an ethereal high octave that's lots of fun even if it is best kept on a short leash. The reverb seems to die out rather abruptly with the decay set anywhere shy of two o'clock, but between that, the blend control and the brilliance-boosting 'warmth' feature, it's easy enough to get your dry signal sitting just as proudly above the swirling wash as you want it.

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

For a swanky delay pedal with a dash of reverb thrown in, try the **EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run** (**£319**) or the **Wampler Ethereal** (**£229**). Alternatively, if you'd prefer a swanky reverb pedal with a dash of delay thrown in, try the **Neunaber Immerse** (**£229**)

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ More than satisfactory as a tape-style delay pedal that's just as impressive for reverb
+ Put the two together for truly epic soundscapes
- Cramped control layout
- No stereo option

*Delay and reverb working together in perfect (albeit mono only) harmony*

**8/10**

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**Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo**
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

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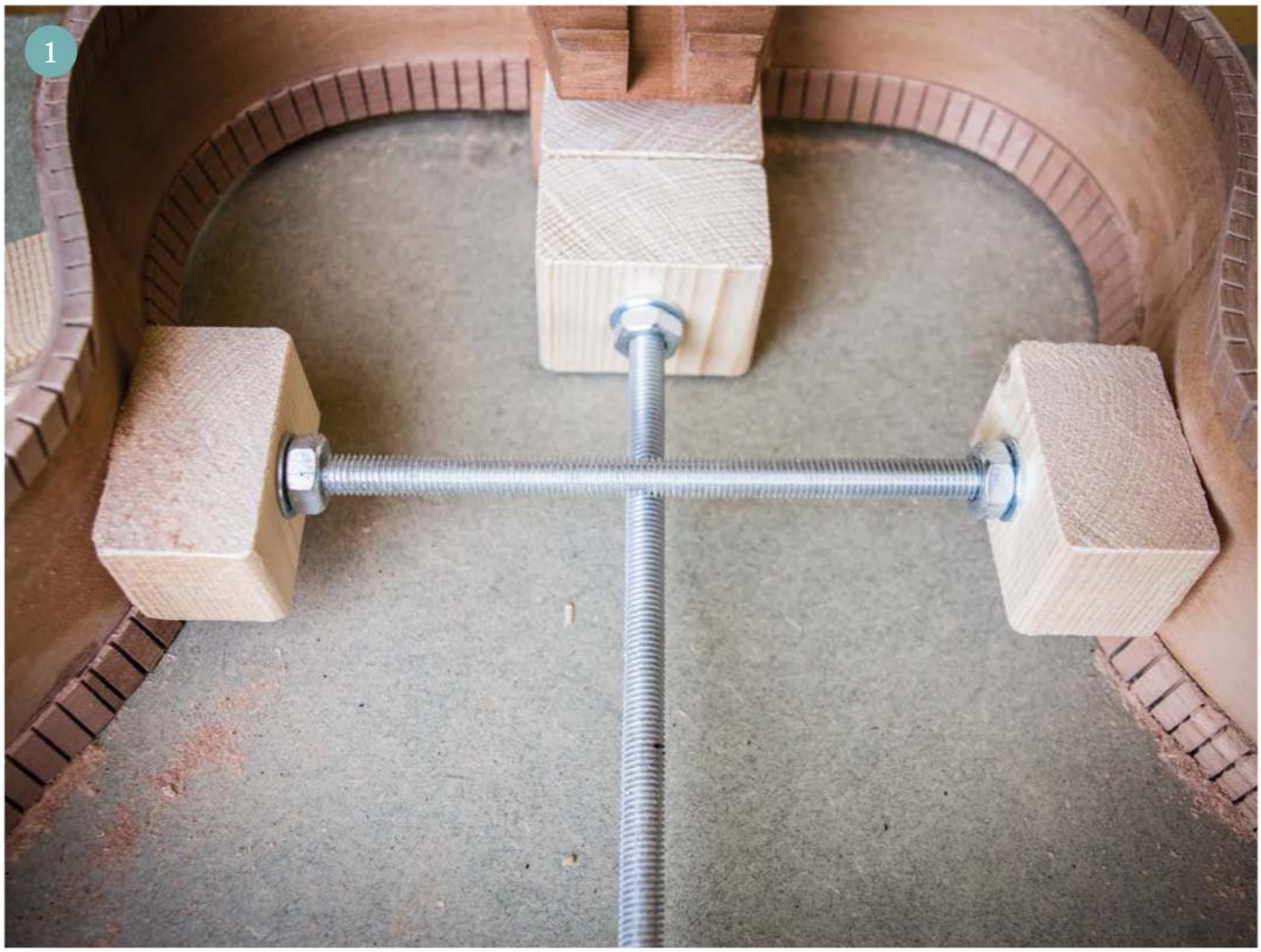
DIY WORKSHOP

# MARTIN GUITAR KIT BUILD

PART TWO

Our Martin acoustic kit build continues, as we level the kerfing, join the back plates and pop a little something in the oven. **HUW PRICE** shapes up...




**1** This easy to make spreader set will hold the sides and blocks square in the mould throughout the body building process

For the first part of our Martin kit build last month, I created a body former for the sides of my 000 and started gluing the heel and tail blocks in place, and now it's time to get things looking a bit more guitar-like.

Now, one thing I've learned the hard way in my time building and repairing instruments is the absolute necessity of keeping things square and centred. This is especially true of the heel block, and if you allow it to become tilted or twisted, setting the neck angle and even ending up with a playable guitar will be that much harder.

Even when the rims are lined up nicely in the mould I created, there's nothing to prevent them from getting out of shape from pressure when gluing the top and the back. Most professional acoustic builders use two spreaders to hold everything in position while the body assembly takes place. One is used lengthways between the heel and tail blocks, and the second goes side to side between the innermost curves of the waist.

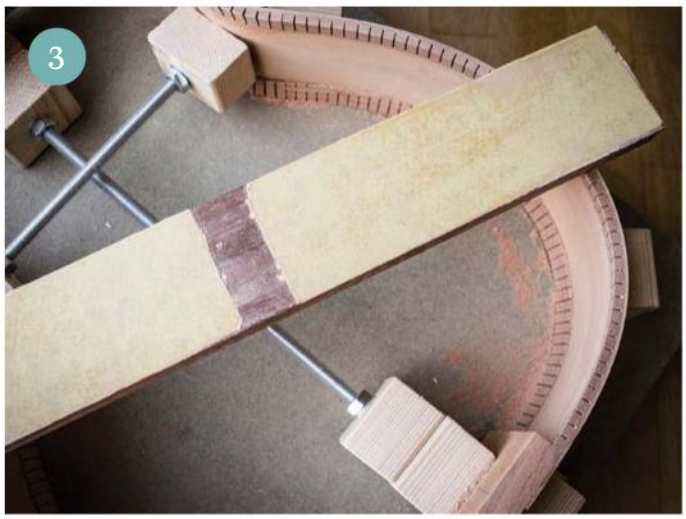
Although you can buy spreaders from luthier suppliers, you can also make your own. I saw off some more blocks from the length of timber I used to create the mould blocks last time out and buy a length of threaded metal rod with some nuts and washers. You can find these items in most DIY outlets.

Holes marginally greater in diameter than the threaded rod – but narrower than the washers – are then drilled into the spreader blocks, and the rod is then cut into suitable lengths. With the nuts and washers in position, the blocks are then slipped over the ends of the rods and the nuts adjusted to press the spreader blocks against the sides.

The idea is that the spreaders will only be removed once the top and back have been glued on. So, I double up the blocks at each end between the heel and tail blocks in order to keep the longitudinal rod's length to a minimum. This is important because if it's too long, you might be unable to remove the rod through the soundhole.

## Kerf-fuffle

As the sides are barely 2mm thick, there's insufficient width to achieve a satisfactory glue joint for the top and back plates. To increase the gluing surface area, strips of kerfing are fixed around the edges of the rims. Various timbers are used, but Martin's appear to be mahogany. The strips are tapered and sawed halfway through at 7.5mm intervals, which allows them to bend easily and conform to the guitar's curves.



Gluing kerfing is quick and easy, but I find it best to divide each quarter into three sections. The one tricky area is the waist because, with OM and 000 shaped guitars, the curve is too pronounced for the kerfing and it tends to snap. Try heating the kerfing before bending it around the waist – a paint stripper gun or hairdryer should work fine. This softens and loosens the fibres, which makes the kerfing more pliable and less likely to snap.

Apply glue to the flat side of the kerfing and position it against the side, leaving it slightly above the rims all the way around. Believe it or not, clothes pegs are ideal for clamping the kerfing in position while the glue dries. You can also use bulldog clips as an alternative if you wish.

Having applied kerfing around the rear edges of the body, I use a file to remove some of the kerfing's excess height. Then I take a dead flat length of timber with 220 grit paper attached using double sided tape. This soon brings the kerfing dead level with the rims while keeping everything flat and square.

Many modern builders prefer angling the edge gluing surfaces to conform to the curvature of the front and back plates, but Martin's traditional method is to level the kerfing at a right angle to the sides. Huss & Dalton offer both styles, with the Martin method deemed to generate more bass, power and projection, but less midrange. In contrast, angled kerfing is said to produce a more even frequency balance.

I decide on flat kerfing, because this is a Martin kit and I do appreciate traditional Martin tone. The first strips of kerfing are glued with clamps holding the rims square, but I install the spreaders when I flip the rims over to do the front side.

With the body in the mould I carefully remove any glue squeeze out from the kerfing and sand the inner surfaces of the sides. Mahogany is a lovely wood to work with, and before long the sides look clean and tidy.

## Truing the edges

Jointing the back plates demands some precision woodworking but specialist tools are not required. In a process known as candling the plates are brought together on a large window. When you look carefully at the join, you will see light shining through gaps at various places along the length. You often need to adjust your viewing angle to see them, but gaps are always there.

Back in the day this was done by candlelight – hence the term – however daylight works, too. This is done because all gaps must be eliminated to ensure a strong and long-lasting glue joint.

**2** Nothing fancy is needed for gluing the kerfing and a set of clothes pegs works just fine

**3** 220 grit sandpaper fixed to a flat plank with double-sided tape is used to level the kerfing with the rims

**4** The glue squeeze out is cleaned, the inside edges are sanded and the levelled kerfing is flat against the backing board

**5** With the back plates brought together against a flat piece of glass, daylight can be seen through the gap

**6** This shooting board has seen a lot of use, but it's still going strong and it only takes minutes to make one yourself

**7** The jointing process reaches its final stages as we move from using the plane to sandpaper

**8** One plate is propped up and strips of binding tape are stretched across the join line leaving small gaps at the centre

To eliminate the gaps you'll need to make a shooting board. Two flat pieces of 18mm MDF or plywood will do fine. Ensure the lengths are equal and longer than the body length of the guitar. The width of one can be less than the other, or you can offset them when you glue one on top of the other. The idea is to create two levels, so the offset pieces of equal size will yield two shooting boards.

Take the back plates and place one on top of the other so that both inner surfaces are facing outwards. Place the back plates on the higher tier of your shooting board with the joint edges overlapping the lower tier then line them up exactly before clamping the plates in position at each end.

The traditional way of trueing the edges is to run a long jointer plane along the length. The plane is positioned with its side surface flat on the shooting board's lower tier and the blade should be set for the finest possible cut. Block and jack planes are really too short for this job.

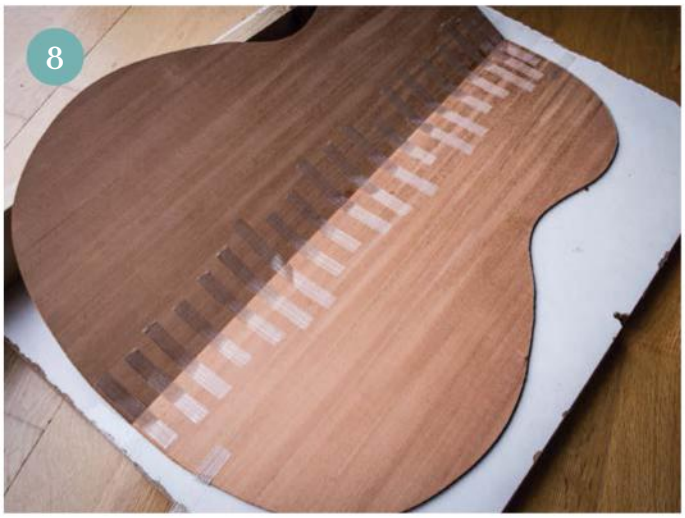
If the shavings are so thin that they turn to powder when you rub them between your fingers, the blade depth is about right. The blade must also be set dead square so an even amount of wood is removed across both joint surfaces. My advice would be to practise on scraps of timber to set the plane correctly before moving onto the back plates.

Make two or three passes then unclamp the plates to check your process using the candling method. It's vital to have perfectly flat glass and I can report from experience that Edwardian and Victorian glass is not flat!

If you're inexperienced with planes, or you don't own one, you can use sandpaper instead, but you'll still need that shooting board. The abrasive must be attached to a dead flat surface – like a carpenter's level or even a jointing plane with its blade fully retracted – with double sided tape. Since we're dealing with small fractions of a millimetre here, I'd suggest 320 grit.

I've never gotten this quite perfect by using a plane alone. This occasion is no exception, and it's only when I swap to sandpaper that I finally manage to close the gaps. Once you're in the ballpark, you'll probably see gaps in certain areas along the joint. Try marking these areas with a pencil to use as a guide when you're removing material from the adjacent high spots.

Towards the final stages you may only need one or two passes with the sandpaper. Taking the plates on and off the shooting board can get tedious, and if you're doing this for the first time, don't be discouraged if it




takes you a few hours to get it right. This bit can be tough no doubt, but do persevere, because you'll get there eventually.

### Gluing the plates

There are various ways to glue the back plates together, but this particular procedure is slightly complicated because the plates have already been shaped. After researching online, I discover Chris Paulick's tape method and I decide to give it a try.

For this you'll need a backing board with a plastic surface or a plastic tape covering to prevent the plates sticking to it. Carefully align the plates and prop one of them up by about 5cm with the other lying flat. You may need to tape the flat piece to the backing board to prevent it sliding.

Take some tape that has some degree of stretchiness – Rothko & Frost's binding tape works just fine. Pre-cut about 20 or so 5cm strips then place them at 2cm intervals all along the join line. The crucial bit is that you must stretch them across leaving a slight gap above the join line.

Carefully bring the plates back together with the tape strips on the inside and lightly clamp them with the joint side up in a vice or workbench. Run a line of glue evenly all along one edge, then remove the plates from the clamp. Place the plates on the backing board tape side down. If the tape has been applied correctly, the plates will be raised up in the centre like a tent.

Now press the centre line flat against the board and the stretchiness of the tape should pull the plates together. Ensure the plates are flat and properly aligned all along the glue line then wipe off the glue squeeze out with a damp rag.

Place a flat plank of wood over the join line and place a heavy

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**9** The plates are pressed flat with the tape strips on the underside then weighed down and clamped overnight as the glue dries

**10** The kit included a black centre strip but we prefer the no-line look and the plates matched up pretty well without it

**11** Two of the back braces are wired tightly before sitting in a 100-degree oven for 90 minutes

weight on top. I use a concrete block and protect the plank with a layer of plastic packing tape. Since the block is shorter than the body, I also clamp the ends.

For this job I decide on Titebond original glue. It's an aliphatic resin that is very popular with guitar builders and it has a much longer open time than hide glue. The plates are left for 24 hours before I remove the clamps and the block and I'm pleased with the way it turned out.

The tape method works, it costs next to nothing and it's an ideal solution for DIY guitar building. I would suggest one or two practice runs before gluing up – but bear in mind that the tape strips will lose some of their stretchiness, so they'll need to be renewed each time. Good preparation is also key, so make sure your wet cloth, plank, claps and weight are all close at hand before you start.

## Oven ready

No doubt this next part will have some experienced guitar builders rolling their eyes but, having been greatly impressed by the tonal properties torrefied timbers on guitars I've played of late, I decide to attempt it myself. Much as I would have liked to torrefy the top plates, I worry that the heat is going to compromise the glue joint. However, the braces seem like fair game and, after talking it over with Alister Atkin, I decide I'll follow his procedure by baking them at 100 degrees centigrade.

My main concern is that the wood might twist a bit when they go into the oven, so I wire up the two back braces tightly against a perforated metal plate – in this case baguette moulds fit the bill nicely. After 90 minutes in the oven the cooled braces look very slightly darker than the non-baked braces.

To my relief they hold their shape, have a noticeable ping when tapped and rustle loudly when being handled. Suitably encouraged, I go ahead and bake the remaining braces. Of course this isn't proper torrefaction as such, but it is good fun!

When we check back with the Martin in a couple of months time, we'll move on to bracing. It will also be the time when I'll have to decide whether to brace the top in the modern or pre-war style. A genuine 1930s Martin would certainly help with the measurements – so watch this space because you never know what might turn up...

## NEXT MONTH...

Our Martin kit project gets put on the back burner as we return to turning our old Greco single-cut into a mid-50s style Goldtop. Plugging PAF routs will be the order of the day...

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# All about... Frets

There are many metal parts on a guitar that impact your tone and playability, but your frets might be the most important of all. **HUW PRICE** puts it all on the wire to help you work out what the right frets are for you...

Although some guitarists have experimented with fretless guitars, they have never really caught on in the same way as fretless basses. It seems we're stuck with frets and for the vast majority of us, that's probably for the best.

Frets divide a fretboard into easy to see semitone intervals that tell us where the notes are. The violin family of instruments (viol notwithstanding) have fretless fingerboards, so skill and accuracy is essential to play in tune. The flipside of this is that they only usually hit one note at a time – as anyone who has tried to learn violin in school can attest, that's hard enough as it is... but imagine trying to play four-note chords in tune on a cello!

Given that chord work is an essential component of guitar playing, that makes frets equally essential for us. There is a drawback to this – if you want to explore microtones or exotic eastern scales, you can't really do it with a conventionally fretted guitar unless you play with a slide, but it's not a pressing problem for the majority.

*When luthiers began inlaying frets into the fretboard, bone strips became commonplace*

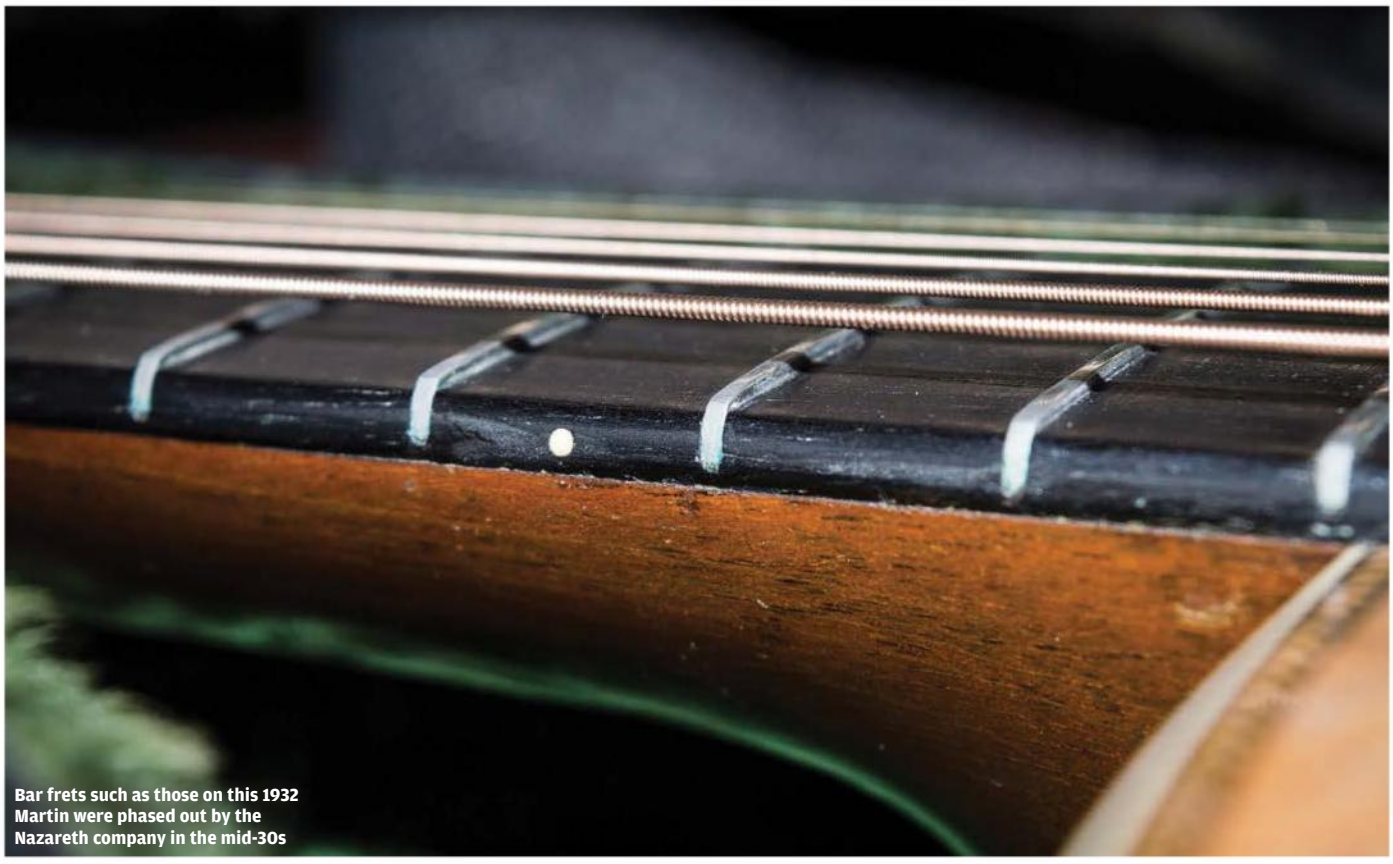
The earliest guitar-like instruments didn't have frets, but as the oud evolved into the lute, luthiers began tying string or gut ligatures around the neck. Presumably these were put on wet and would shrink and tighten as they dried. Players would feel the ligatures front and back, and with knots along the bass edge of the fingerboard, thumb wrapping would have been best avoided.

When luthiers began inlaying frets into the fretboard, bone strips became commonplace. Bone may have been tough enough for gut strings, but as wire-wrapped strings were introduced, metal became the material of choice for frets and has remained so ever since.

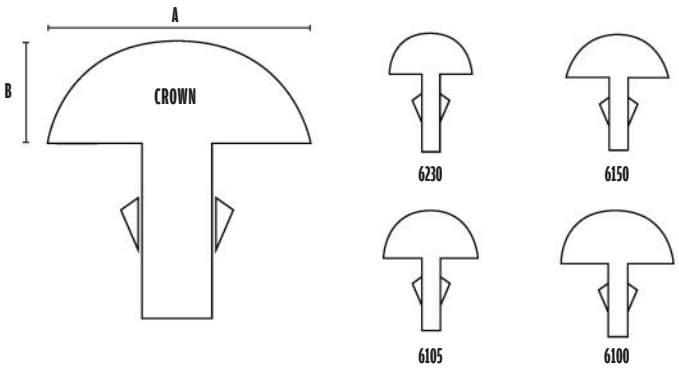
## Shape Up

The earliest style metal frets look quite different to the ones that we know and love today. These early types are commonly known as 'bar frets' because they are flat-sided metal bars that are radiused top and bottom and pressed into the fret slots. What you can see above the fingerboard is identical to the portion embedded in the slot, so they are rectangular in cross section.

They require wider slots than modern fret wire, so the slots are milled rather than sawn into the fingerboard. This type of fretwire is mostly associated with vintage acoustics, and Martins in particular. Martin even made its own fretwire at one time, but phased out bar frets during the mid-1930s.



**Bar frets such as those on this 1932 Martin were phased out by the Nazareth company in the mid-30s**




**6230** This is the smallest wire found in older Fender necks. **Size (AxB) 0.078 x 0.43"**
**6150** Vintage jumbo. Much wider but not as tall as the 6230. **Size (AxB) 0.102 x 0.042"**
**6105** Contemporary narrow and tall, a very popular choice. **Size (AxB) 0.090 x 0.055"**
**6100** This is jumbo, usually the biggest guitar wire available. **Size (AxB) 0.110 x 0.055"**
**6130** Often refered to as medium jumbo. **Size (AxB) 0.106 x 0.036"**

John D'Angelico reportedly continued buying bar fretwire from Martin for many years after the company phased it out in its own guitars, and bar fretwire is still available for vintage restoration work today. There's even a clique of acoustic players who prefer the vintage feel and look of the bar style.

However, patented during the 1920s by Clinton F Smith, the 'T-fret' soon became the industry standard – and remains so to this day. The letter 'T' stands for tang, and in cross section the T-fret closely resembles a mushroom. The tang is far narrower than a bar fret and it was designed to fit into slots that were sawn into the fingerboard. The tangs hold position due to a friction fit, aided by barbs that help it to grip the sides and prevent the fret from working its way out of the slot.

The tangs are so narrow it would be almost impossible to round over the edges if the part of the fret above the 'board were equally narrow. They would also cut into the strings and feel very uncomfortable. Instead Smith devised a wider top section called a crown, with a flat surface to sit against the fingerboard and a rounded upper portion. Rounding off the crown makes T-frets more comfortable than the square-edged bar frets and provides more accurate intonation. This is because the take off point for the string is directly above the slot, rather than the nut-side edge of a bar.

### Size Matters

Although most frets are now T-frets, they are not all created equal. It's something you should consider as a player, but absolutely essential for guitar repairers. Crowns vary in width and height, which will affect the way a guitar feels. Some also suggest it changes the tone, too.

Tall crowns can almost make a fretboard feel like it has been scalloped. You can really get your fingers under the strings for easier bends and controlled vibrato. The downsides are that when you're sliding up and down the neck, it can feel like speed bumps under your fingers, and if you press too hard when you're fretting, notes will sound sharp.

This is why tall and wide may be preferable to tall and thin. Wider crowns allow for a more gradual curve, so the frets will feel softer as your fingers move along the 'board. This is one of the reasons why so many rock players and shredders prefer wide and tall frets.

Traditionally, Fender used skinnier wire than Gibson, and if you buy from a supplier such as Allparts UK or Stewart-MacDonald, you can read the dimensions to determine the best match if you're doing a vintage restoration or trying to improve overall feel. There are also technical aspects to consider if you or your luthier are replacing frets. When the original frets are removed, it's advisable to measure the tang depth and width to determine if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Vintage Fender fretwire on a mid-1960s Telecaster

the new wire you want to use will be compatible with the existing fret slots.

To do this you'll need a micrometer or some digital callipers. If the tangs are too narrow, the frets won't stay in the slots, and if they're too wide for the slots, you may force the neck into a backbow that will make the guitar unplayable. Equally, if they're too tall, the frets won't seat properly and you will see gaps between the crown and the fingerboard. Of course you can cut fret slots deeper and wider, but it's best avoided unless it's impossible to find fretwire that will fit the existing slots.

## Tonal Traits

During the 1950s, many jazz players preferred ultra-low frets. The Les Paul Custom of that period was marketed as 'The Fretless Wonder', and in the bend-free era of wound Gs, low frets made sense. However, guitar playing evolved and vintage guitars with ultra-low frets can cause difficulties for blues and rock players. Attitudes towards fret originality have changed in the vintage world, and these days a pro refret is deemed acceptable – indeed desirable – on all but the most historically significant and original examples.

One of the many myths associated with Stevie Ray Vaughan is that fat frets equal fat tone. He supposedly preferred massive fret wire – even having his necks fitted with bass frets. No doubt they provided extra control and grip as he bent those 0.013 gauge strings, but do frets really make that much difference to tone?

*A pro refret is deemed acceptable – indeed desirable – on all but the most historically significant guitars*

Supposing the frets are level and all the crowns are properly rounded, the area of physical contact between the strings and the frets would be identical irrespective of crown width. This could change as frets acquire playwear, because a wider and flatter surface might reduce crispness and definition. In other words, the guitar might sound softer and less bright.

You could also make the argument that fat frets might add mass and stiffness to the neck, but we're talking fine margins that may only be apparent when playing unplugged. All things considered, we'd suggest playing feel and longevity are more important considerations than tone when choosing fretwire.

## Material Pleasures

Although brass is sometimes also used, the vast majority of guitar fretwire is made with nickel silver – also known as German silver. Rather confusingly, there's not actually any silver involved with German silver – nickel silver is actually an alloy of copper and nickel. Simple.

The proportions tend to vary, but most fretwire contains about 18 per cent nickel for durability and 80 per cent copper to make it sufficiently pliable and soft enough to be filed, shaped and polished for use. Jescar's NS frets, for example, have only 62 per cent copper, with 18 per cent nickel and 20 per cent zinc.

Some individuals are unfortunate enough to suffer from a nickel allergy, so stainless steel frets are an option in these cases. Stainless steel is notoriously hard on tools and requires a lot of physical effort to level, shape and polish. So, a stainless steel fret job tends to be more expensive.

On the plus side, stainless steel frets provide a super smooth surface for string bending and they retain their shine indefinitely. The steel is also so tough that you may never again need a refret, but busy players may end up spending a lot more on strings – especially those who use pure nickel because it's softer than steel. Some players also believe that stainless steel frets can add brightness to the tone.

Jescar's EVO gold fretwire is another option that is made from an alloy specially developed for people with nickel allergies. It's said to be tougher than nickel and very long lasting, but easier to work than stainless steel.

Like anything else, frets are a matter of personal taste, but when you find the right combination of size and material for you, it can greatly enhance your playing experience.

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# Chord Clinic

Augmented chords are not exactly commonplace, but dropped into the right chord sequence they have a unique function. **ROD FOGG** investigates their potential...

Theory books will tell you that there are four kinds of triad; major, minor, diminished and augmented. Major and minor chords carry the weight of most songwriting – diminished chords are rare, and often appear as diminished seventh chords, which we took a look at last month. Augmented chords are also rare and are built from two major thirds, one on top of the other (for example, C augmented contains the notes C, E and G♯). This means that they contain a root, major third and augmented fifth, and have a sound all of their own that can take a chord sequence in an unusual direction.

One of the coolest uses of an augmented chord is as an introduction. Check out the Chuck Berry classic *School Day*, The Beatles' *Oh Darling* or Dire Straits' *Eastbound Train* to hear this kind of approach. Figure 1 will get you started with a selection of augmented chords. It could be the built-in dissonance in an augmented triad that led Chuck to use this chord in imitation of the school bell; in the Dire Straits tune its similarity to an old-style steam train whistle makes it work in this very train-centred song. In all these cases the augmented chord is being used as a substitute

*Figure 1*

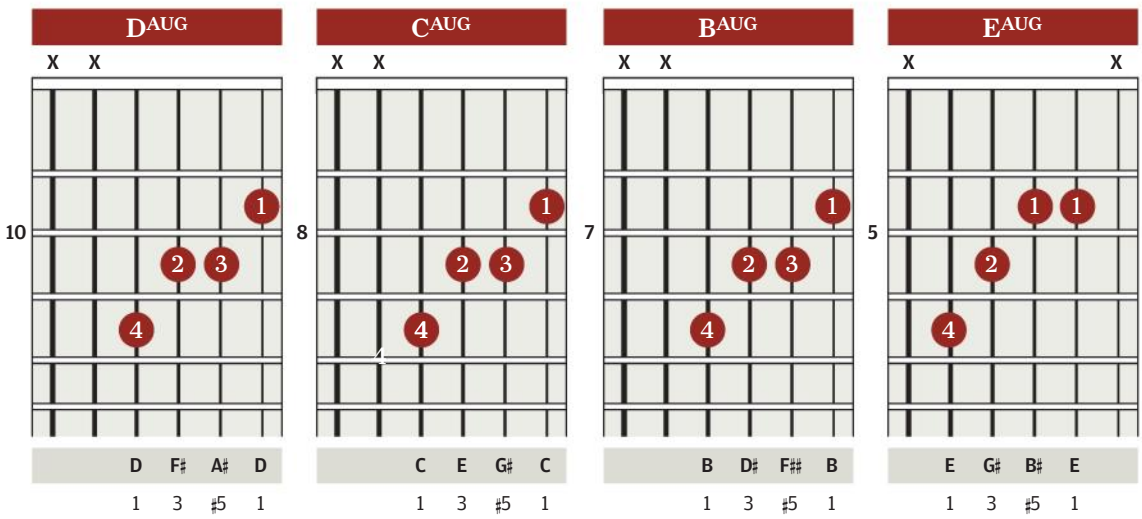



*Figure 2*

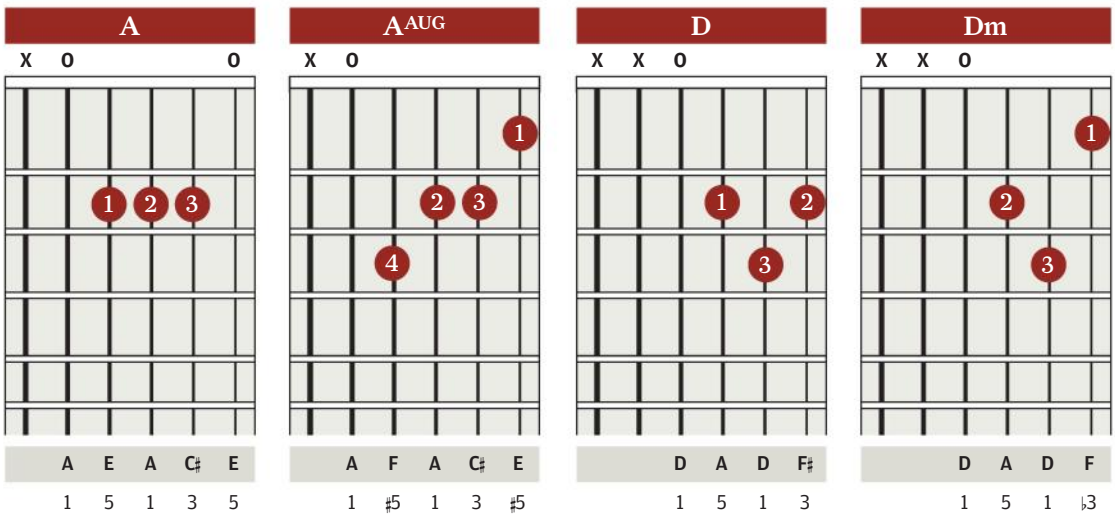
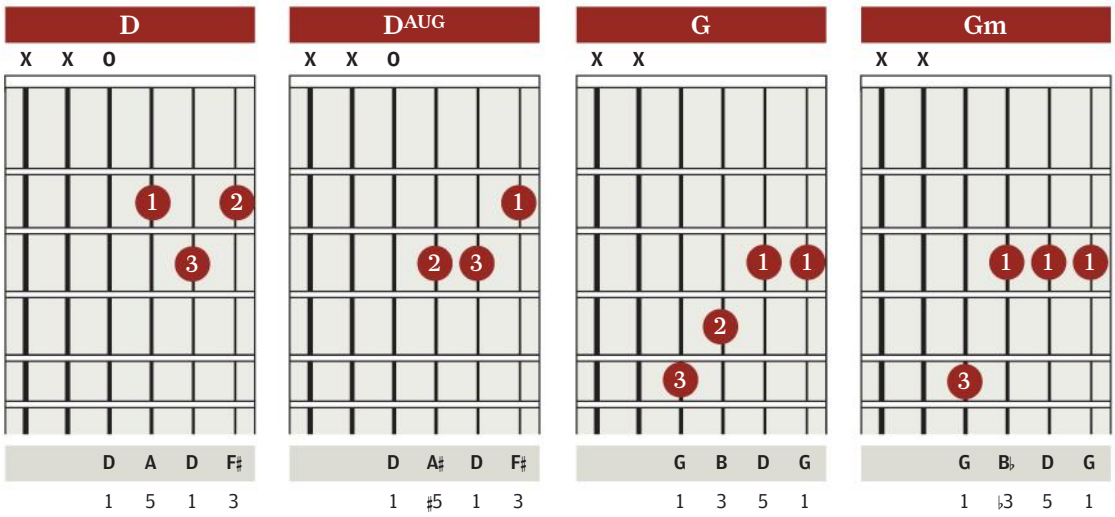


*Figure 3*




for chord V, the dominant. Try following D augmented with G major or B augmented with E major to hear the V-I, dominant – tonic relationship.

The Beatles' intro sounds like a combination of piano and guitar. If you can get together with another guitarist try playing the E augmented triad underneath the C augmented, as it will certainly beef up the sound, but in fact it's the same three notes. Which brings us to this month's theory moment. Caug is C, E and G♯. Eaug is E, G♯ and C (which technically should be called B♯). G♯aug is... well, you can probably see where this is going. Basically, any note in an augmented chord can be its root, because an augmented chord is simply a pile of major thirds. This also means that there are only four different augmented triads. C, C#, D and D#. Next comes Eaug, which is the same as C, back where we started.

Figures 2 and 3 feature the same chord sequence in A major and D major. Play each of the four chords for one bar each in a rhythm of your own choosing. Notice the way that the augmented chord adds tension to the tonic which is resolved by arriving on the next chord – technically the IV chord or sub-dominant. This is the same as the V-I relationship mentioned above, except that now it is I-IV. You can hear this sort of sequence in the likes of Lesley Gore's *It's My Party* or Roy Orbison's *Crying*.

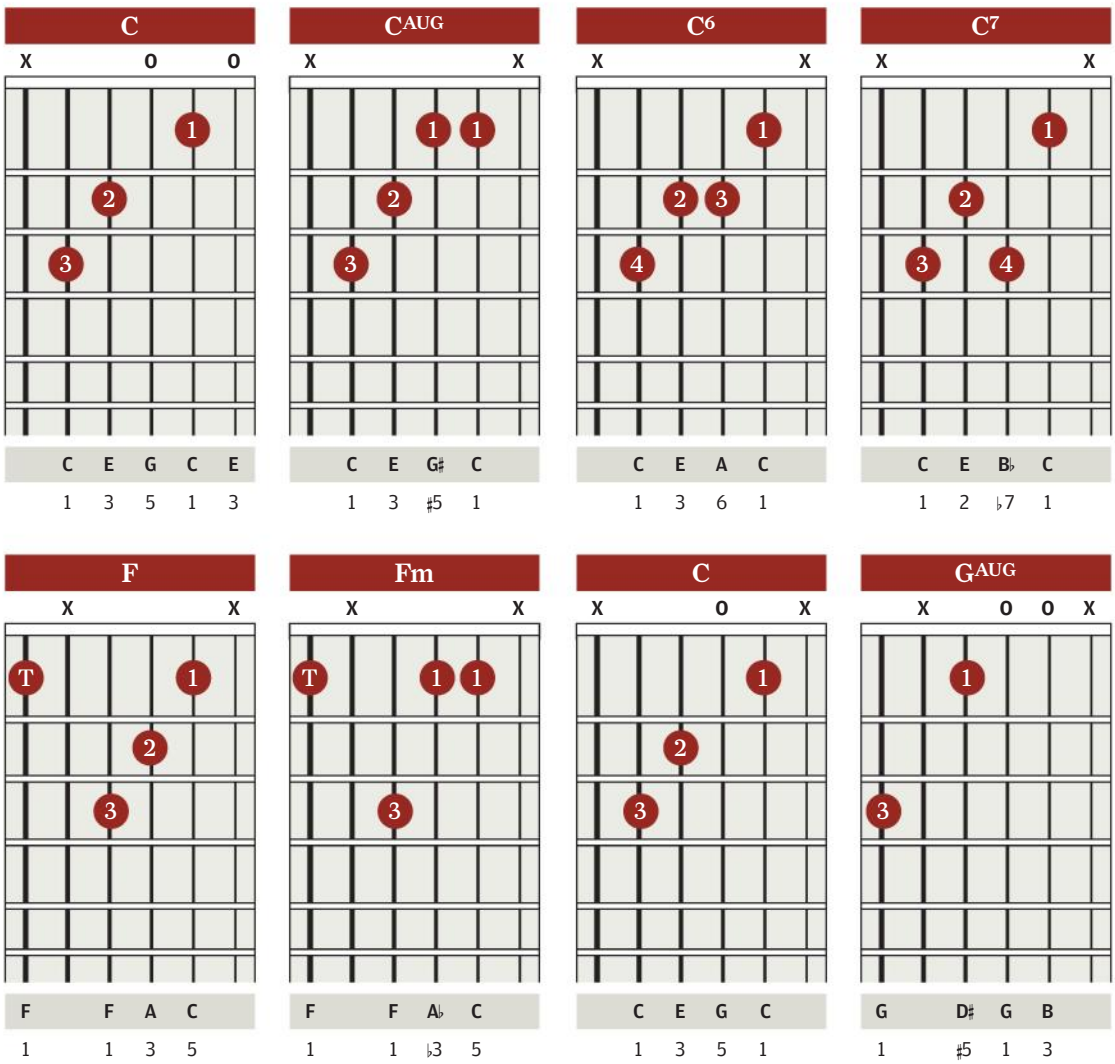
We've chosen to use the abbreviation 'aug' for an augmented chord, but sometimes you will see a plus sign, as in 'C+', or a ♯5 in a smaller font, as in C♯5. Caug seems simpler and less likely to be misinterpreted.

Figure 4 switches to the key of C major and places an augmented chord in another likely position, as a passing chord between

chord I and its major sixth, as in C, Caug, C6. Very often this sequence will do what we have done here, and progress to C7 and F. Its interesting how often the IVm chord (F minor in this example) appears in these chord sequences. Could it be that the third of F minor (A♭), being the same note as the sharpened fifth of C augmented (G♯) gives a satisfying sense of completion as you return to C major as the next chord in the sequence. The final chord, Gaug, is another example of an augmented chord being used instead of a dominant as it points you back to the start of the eight bar chord sequence. Experiment with G7 or a plain G major in its place to hear the difference and augmented chord can make.

It is possible to add a seventh to an augmented triad, creating a chord of, for example, G7♯5. We will take a look at those in a future instalment. In the meantime, have fun experimenting with augmented chords in your own chord sequences and I'll see you next month.

*Figure 4*



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# Sonny Landreth

The slide maestro on tweaked Strats, playing 'sinful music and enjoying it' and the importance of the wine list...

**1 I couldn't live without my...**
"The prototype Strat I worked on with Fender for several years, because it's so tweaked out for the way I play. Other guitars of mine are more precious to me, though. I'd definitely grab the 1960 Les Paul Sunburst that belonged to my best friend before he died almost 20 years ago."

**2 In another life I'd be...**
"I was also really into art when I was a kid, and for many years did charcoals and oil painting. Then, on my 13th birthday, my parents gave me a big Kay acoustic guitar and that was that."

**3 The moment it started...**
"I was enthralled with Elvis. But when he made his first appearance on TV, I caught my first glimpse of Scotty Moore and realised *he* was the one making the sound that had me so fired up and man, I wanted to learn how to play guitar like *that*!

**4 The one that got away...**
"I've certainly had my share of those, but the '64 Strat that a friend of mine sold before I could get the $250 together to pay him for it probably tops the list. Also, there was an early 50-watt Marshall head I loved that proved to be one of the best sounding amps I've ever had, and it got stolen one night at a club. That was 37 years ago and I still think about it sometimes and wonder where the hell it is."

**5 My Spinal Tap moment...**
"The band I was in got run out of town by a priest via police escort for playing, 'sinful music and enjoying it' at a youth dance. Then there was the infamous Christmas brawl of '71. After a young woman came crashing through the floor monitors, I looked up and saw everyone in the hall, men *and* women, fighting under a banner that read 'Happy Holidays To All'"

*"I looked up and saw everyone in the hall fighting under a banner that read 'Happy Holidays To All'"*

**6 The best advice that I've ever been given...**
"I pretty much grew up in my hometown music store and an older kid who worked there named Raymond Decou turned me on to Chet Atkins. He said I needed to learn how to fingerpick like Chet and showed me how to play multiple parts at the same time with Chet's *Yankee Doodle Dixie*. It totally blew my mind and set me on my path."

**7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...**
"If I'm testing out gear, like a backline rental amp, to see what it's made of, I'll play some basic open positions in a chordal tuning then slide up to the 12th fret and let it ring, listening to the harmonic content and how the overtones decay. Then I'll play some individual lines for melodic sustain and some palm muting to see how it feels percussively. You can get a good idea of what you'll have for the evening that way. But if it's my usual rig and especially if I'm at home – I just play whatever comes out without thinking about it. That tends to be the best thing that I'll come up with for the day and possibly the start of a new song."

**8 The most important thing that's on my rider...**
"Without a doubt, the wine list."

**9 My guilty pleasure...**
"I have too much gear. But when I find something that's not only shiny but actually inspires me to play better, it's a nice affirmation."

**10 If I could play one thing...**
"World renowned maestro Mariuz Smolij invited me to perform Bach's *Cantata #140* (*'Wachet Auf'*) with the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra several years ago and though I was excited to get the chance to interpret this classic, I knew it wouldn't be easy. Such lyrical beauty, spiritual depth and the range of emotions it evoked resonated with me. But it's a challenge to play on slide! Melodically, it's constantly moving and I have to shift positions with each variation of the main theme in ways I wouldn't normally do. It just takes so much focus to keep it fluid, serve every nuance and still be able to let it sing. I've now performed it in concert on three separate occasions and though I've felt good about it when practicing at home, I've yet to nail it to my satisfaction in public. I'm hoping the fourth time will be the charm."

**Sonny Landreth's latest album, *Recorded Live In Lafayette*, is out now on Provogue**

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